



Fostering National Integration in Nigeria through Quality Education

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ABSTRACT

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Nigerians in recent times appear to be more disconnected from one another than ever before. This has led to various forms of agitations in the form of restructuring, devolution of powers, self-determination, resource control and even insurgency, all pointing to the fact that the country is badly in need of national integration. With analysis of various literatures; this paper argues that quality education can be the panacea to the problem of national disintegration in Nigeria. National integration presupposes a situation where the various cleavages that have held the people from national consciousness like ethnicity, tribalism, religion and culture are minimized. The findings show that such measures as introduction of NYSC, Federal character, Quota system, revenue sharing formula and others have done little to ameliorate the divides, thus impeding on a progressive development for the country. The paper posits the measure of quality education as a way out. It there submits that if quality education is attained, national integration would be achieved. Recommendations therefore include, increasing annual budget for education to at least 12 percent of GDP, improving teachers' remuneration and government honouring its agreement with various academic unions to prevent the incessant industrial actions that have continuously plagued quality education in Nigeria.

Keywords:

Quality Education, National Integration, Agitations, Restructuring, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there have been strident calls for restructuring of the country and even agitations for self determination by some separatist groups. These are mainly borne out of allegations of marginalization by different ethnic or religious groups. Nigeria no doubt is a large country made up of different cultural and religious affinities. Nigeria's plurality which appears to be the beauty of the country has accounted largely for its stagnation as per development. Its plurality has not been managed properly since its independence and so, intermittently, various groups call for restructuring or even separation. The only explanation of these continuous calls or agitations is that the different peoples of the country have not been fully integrated. Many people do not feel belonged in the Nigerian project, while some feel that they own the country more than others. Measures put in place to integrate the seemingly weaker parts of the country have not yielded the desired result as some of them have proven to be counter-productive especially as they have in the name of protecting the weak, hurt other groups.

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For example, the federal character policy is manipulated to favour some and disfavor others and has sacrificed merit for equal representation. People who continuously find it difficult to gain admission into tertiary institutions or employment in the federal civil service cannot feel integrated and hence find the word "patriotism" to be a misnomer. Where people do not have a sense of belonging, where people feel marginalized and where people do not have a sense of ownership it would be very difficult to expect sacrifices from them. Although, there have been various attempts by the Federal Government especially after the civil war to address the problem of national integration through the National Youth Service Corps, Federal Character Commission and the quota system, the various peoples of the country cannot with certainty, be said to have been fully integrated.

The thrust of this paper therefore, is to look the way of education as a more potent way of fostering national integration in Nigeria.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Quality Education

Education of course has been variously defined by scholars. Nwagwu (2017) defines education as the process by which every society attempts to preserve and upgrade the accumulated knowledge, skills and attitudes in its cultural

setting and heritage in order to foster and guarantee its survival. for Okafor (2014), education is defined as a process of acculturation through which the individual is helped to attain the development of his potentials and their maximum activation when necessary according to right reason and to achieve thereby his perfect self-fulfillment.

In the same vein, Chauhan (2009) defines education as the shaping of behavior or modification of behaviors of the individual for adequate adjustment in the society. One of the most popular definitions of education is that of Fafunwa (2010) which states that education is the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviors that are of positive values to the society in which he lives. Other scholars who have attempted definitions of education include Frankena (2018), Ukeje, (2009), Plato and Aristotle. Summarily, education has to do with the development of an individual through various methods to be of use to both himself and the society at large.

Quality education however can be differentiated from the ordinary definition of education. The call for a quality education by the UN is beyond mere access to any education but a grand step in ensuring that all children and not just those from high income countries have quality education. The UNICEF (2000) defines quality education as one that is pedagogically and developmentally sound and educates the students in becoming active and productive members of the society. A quality education is not one that is measured purely by a test score or by how many words per minute a 5 year old can read. According to the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), based in Washington DC and Education International (EI) based in Brussels, Belgium, quality education is defined as one that focuses on the whole child- the social, emotional, mental, physical and cognitive of each student regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status or geographic location. It prepares the child for life, not just for testing.

A quality education provides resources and direct policy to ensure that each child enters school healthy and learn about and practice a healthy lifestyle; learns in an environment that is physically and emotionally safe for students and adults; is actively engaged in learning and is connected to the school and border community; has access to personalized learning and is supported by qualified caring adults; and is challenged academically and prepared for success in college or further study and for employment and participation in a global environment.

A quality education provides the outcomes needed for individuals, communities and societies to prosper. It allows schools to align and integrate fully with their communities and access a range of services across sectors designed to support the educational development of students. A quality education is supported by three pillars: ensuring access to quality teachers; providing use of quality learning tools and professional development; and the establishment of

safe and supportive quality learning environments (PALNETWORK, 2021)

National integration

According to Onyeakazi and Ejike (2018) national integration is mainly the process of bringing the various peoples of different cultural and social background together in a given social context or polity for their collective interest and good. A classic definition of national integration is that given by Weiner (1967) which states that national integration refers specifically to the problem of creating sense of territorial nationality which overshadows or eliminates subordinate parochial loyalties. In furtherance, Weiner and Laparan (1969) aver that national integration primarily involves the amalgamation of disparate social, economic religious, ethnic and geographic elements into a single nation state. In the same vein, Hogan (2006) postulates that national integration involves the uniting of formerly separate groups into one group with the obliteration of any previous social and cultural group differences as well as the obliteration of separate group identifications.

The above definitions imply in a nutshell that national integration is the awareness of a common identity among the citizens of a country, meaning that though the individuals belong to different communities, castes, religions, cultures and regions and speak different languages all of them recognize the fact that they are one.

Factors Responsible for Lack of National Integration in Nigeria

With the attainment of independence in 1960 it was expected that the new nation would improve rapidly into development, unfortunately, after 62 years the country's development has suffered serial retrogression because of lack of national cohesiveness among its citizens. Uriah, Amadi, Moneme (2020) identify some of the factors that have posed as obstacle to national integration in Nigeria. These include:

1. The 1966 coup d'état: The coup d'état brought an abrupt end to the nation's nascent democracy and foisted the first military dictatorship on the country. In its trail were the lives of prominent northern leaders that were lost. A counter coup by northern army officers later led to a pogrom of the Igbos and the conflagration culminated into a civil war later in 1967.
2. The civil war: The war even when it ended in 1970 left a big crevice in the minds of people in the opposite divides of the war. The indelible scar left as a result has continuously led to mutual suspicion thereby promoting the quest for disintegration of the Nigerian nation.
3. Accentuating of ethnic or even religious differences by politicians for selfish political gains has overtime heated the polity as well as led to bloody riots. National integration continues to suffer as people view themselves more as ethnic citizens than as Nigerian citizens.

4. Skewed Federal System: Adoption of federalism was with the intent that all parts of the country would have a sense of belonging. However, Ihonopi and Urim (2012) in their study of the failure of the federal system to address the question of unity, local rule and development, argued that federalism as it is practiced in Nigeria suffers because of lack of fiscal federalism, over-centralization of power at the centre, non viable states among others.
5. Again, the fear of losing control by the ruling class is standing in the path of national integration in Nigeria. The ruling class would rather have a faulty state structure riddled with ethnic and religious sentiments where they benefit than have them restructured for the benefit of all.

Other factors identified are corruption and lack of political will by those in authority to address the problems. The corollary of the above factors has thus led to centrifugal forces pulling the nation in different directions. Thus such separatist organizations that can continue to undermine the unity of the country rear their heads every now and then. These include such organizations as Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) Boko Haram, Islamic State of West African Province (ISWAP), Niger Delta Militants, Oodua People's Congress, Arewa Youths Congress and others.

Efforts of Government in Addressing Problems of National Integration

Knowing the pluralistic nature of the Nigeria federation, it would be foolhardy for the various governments to be silent about the differences that are seen in the polity. Some of the efforts identified by some scholars (Ojo, 2009, Buluma, 2012, Akpan, 1990) are:

- i. Adoption of a federal system before independence in the 1954 by Lyttleton constitution,
- ii. State creation at various times to address cries of marginalization especially by the minority tribes under major or large ethnic groups. Thus, we have the nation move from the initial three regions at independence to thirty-six states plus a Federal Capital Territory today;
- iii. Introduction of National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) with the objective of enhancing interaction among the educated elite in the country,
- iv. Federal Character Commission which aims at achieving fair and effective representation of the various components of the federation in the country's position of power, status and influence,

- v. Moving of Nigeria's capital from Lagos to Abuja. This was seen as an integrative policy of the government to further unite Nigerians
- vi. and also revenue sharing formula with the aim of addressing the violence taking place in the oil rich Delta region.

Education and National Integration

The role of education as a tool in fostering national integration among the diverse groups that make up the nation cannot be over-emphasized. These roles as seen by Uriah (2019) are;

1. It provides people with knowledge that is very essential for national integration.
2. It brings uniformity among people of the country and helps them to differentiate among things that play a role in their lives.
3. Education also creates awareness of our responsibilities to inculcate values and balance our lives
4. Education gives maturity, understanding and knowledge of what is happening around and so with this knowledge, one understands the actual meaning of integration of themselves.
5. It can unite people and create a bond which will be strong enough to overcome any challenges faced by a country whether it's economic, political, social issues etc.
6. It shapes people's mind and heart for its past and present to have a cooperative and integrated Nigerian future.
7. Education instills in citizens the consciousness of the strength in togetherness.

Achieving Quality in the Educational System in Nigeria

Quality education as we said above is the education that prepares the child for life and not just for testing. To get such an education the country must provide the environment, the personnel, the motivation that would prepare the child for further education and participation in a global environment.

Obasi (2010) identifies the indicators of quality and functional education as:

1. Effective and efficient performance of graduates in society, industries and other places.
2. Employability of graduates or products
3. National and international mobility of generated manpower
4. Market value or demand level of research products and other services provided by the institutions.
5. Level of discipline and patriotism of graduates.
6. International transferability/admissibility of graduates/students for higher studies without remedial conditions.
7. High rating of an institution and its products nationally and internationally.
8. High absorptive capacity all levels

If however education would make for national integration it has to be characterized by following qualities according to UNICEF (2010).

- i. Learners who are healthy, well-nourished and ready to participate and learn and supported by their families and communities.
- ii. Environments that are healthy, safe, protective and gender sensitive and provide adequate resources and facilities
- iii. Content that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic skills for life and knowledge in such areas as genders, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention and peace.
- iv. Processes through which trained teachers use child-centered teaching approaches in well managed classrooms and schools and skillful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities.

Factors Militating Against Quality Education in Nigeria

Thom-otuya and Inko-tariah (2016), Etesike (2011) identified and enumerated some of the factors militating against quality education in Nigeria as: inadequate funding, inadequate infrastructural facilities, lack of qualified teachers, problem of poor policy implementation, incessant strikes and examination malpractices. Iwundu and Thom-otuya (2014) added politicization and abuse of the education sector, bribery and corruption, unemployment and lack of emphasis on entrepreneurship education as factors to those of Eterike.

In a more detailed analysis of factors militating against quality education in Nigeria, Obasi (2010) divided the factors into socio-cultural, institutional, political and student factors. The socio-cultural factors include:

- i. Moral degeneration in society
- ii. Inverted value system
- iii. Poor reading culture
- iv. Poor family socialization
- v. Low status of knowledge/education and teachers
- vi. Militarization of society
- vii. Generation gaps between teachers and students

Institutional factors:

- i. Mismanagement of resources
- ii. Examination malpractices
- iii. Cultism
- iv. Commercialization/monetization of grades, admission, teaching materials
- v. Inadequate/poor quality staffing
- vi. Obsolete/inadequate facilities, workshop, laboratories
- vii. Inadequate/weak linkages

Political factors

- i. Politicization of education and educational institution (e.g. politicization of the appointment of Chief Executives and funding)
- ii. Poor/non-implementation of policies
- iii. Weak and anachronistic legal framework

Techno-economic factors

- i. Poor funding
- ii. Inadequate/unreliable infrastructural/social amenities
- iii. Low ICT knowledge/content

CONCLUSION

National integration is very essential for both the development and progress of every nation especially as it promotes national unity and consciousness. It is seen to also develop in citizens the spirit of responsiveness when dealing with national calamities and disasters and at the same time reduces fear, suspicion and strife and makes for peaceful co-existence. For a country like Nigeria, with its pluralistic nature, in ethnicity, culture and religion, national integration is of utmost importance. Overtime the nation has adopted various measures to integrate its various peoples with such things as creation of more states, introduction of NYSC, adopting the principle of federal character and introduction of revenue sharing formula among others.

This paper looked at another angle which if serious attention is given to it might help in making for a greater and faster national integration. That area is quality education. The paper submits that quality education which focuses on the whole child, social, emotional, mental and physical development regardless of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status or geographic location has the ability to unite the people and create a bond which will be strong enough to overcome any challenges faced by the country either its economic, political or social issues especially as it instills in the citizens the consciousness of the strength in togetherness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To make for a quality education that would tackle the problem of lack of national integration in Nigeria, the following recommendations are made:

1. One major problem that has bedeviled the Nigerian education system is poor funding. Government both at the Federal and State levels should increase their funding in education. Presently, education accounts for 7.12 percent of the GDP as against the 25 percent recommended by the World Bank or even 15 percent for low income countries. Government should increase education spending to at least 12 percent to make a meaningful impact on the quality of education.
2. Motivation of teachers at all levels of education in Nigeria has perennially been very low leading to industrial action more often than not, especially at the tertiary levels. To curb this, the Federal Government should honour agreements reached with the various academic unions and also increase the remuneration of teachers.
3. Recruitment of teachers should not be based on sentiments, but follow strict laid down procedures.

Only qualified teachers can provide quality education.

4. Government should not neglect schools under its funding as the public schools are the ones affordable and within the reach of the vast majority of the masses. Most private schools are expensive for the average Nigerian. For education to be for all, government should make it possible.
5. Supervision of quality should be seriously undertaken by the education authorities to ensure quality content delivery.

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