SECONDARY EDUCATION AS A TOOL OF NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN NIGERIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract
Nigeria is a heterogeneous country with multi-ethnic and religious divergent groups. Its nature of heterogeneity has led to mutual mistrust and suspicions among the diverse ethnic and religious groups with its negative effects on national integration. The main focus of this paper is, therefore, to examine the relevance of secondary education in fostering national integration among these divergent groups with a view to enhancing national unity in diversity. The paper stresses the fact that secondary education has the potential to create necessary awareness among the younger ones on the need for peaceful co-existence. Thus, effective secondary education ensures the production of responsible citizens with worthwhile knowledge, skills and values which will enable them contribute their quota to the overall development of the nation. The paper recommends amongst others ;proper funding of secondary education by the government at all levels, adequate supervision of secondary education by the authorities to see that the secondary education curriculum is well implemented, secondary education should be made mandatory for all children in Nigeria to reduce the level of ignorance and illiteracy in the country, and creation of jobs to teeming unemployed youths against ethnic barriers by the government to promote ethnic integration.

Keywords: Education, Secondary Education, Nation, National Integration

Introduction

Nigeria as a nation is heterogeneous in nature. Her state of heterogeneity has been, as being observed, responsible for mutual mistrust and suspicion among the various ethnic groups that make up the entity. Nigeria got her independence from British colonial masters in 1960. The inability of the first generation leaders of Nigeria to manage the challenges that independence bequeathed to them led to the crisis/wars of 1967 to 1970 and partly led to the military intervention.

However, sixty years after independence from British colonial masters, Nigeria is worse off in economy, education, health, social security, infrastructural development etc. Nigeria's situation, in terms of ethnic religious and militia crises,

continues to be worrisome to such an extent that countries like U.S.A, United Kingdom, and Canada etc have declared Nigeria as an unsafe country for their citizens. The prevalence of ethnic militancy, political gansterism, farmers-herders bloody clashes are as a result of mutual mistrust and suspicions among the various ethnic groups in the country. For the nation to benefit from global economic process, it must not derail from democratic governance. Therefore, integration of Nigeria is a prerequisite in the scheme of its development struggle.

In fostering national integration in Nigeria, the role of secondary education cannot be underestimated. This assertion is based on the premise that secondary education creates necessary awareness among the younger ones on the need for national integration and peaceful co-existence. Thus, the main aim of secondary school education in the Nigerian educational scene is the production of individuals who can think for themselves, respect views of and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labour, appreciate these values specified under our broad national goals (NPE, 2004).

The above exposition stresses the significance of the secondary school education in molding the attitude of Nigerian youths for national integration and social reconstruction.

Conceptual Clarification; Education

The word 'education' is variously defined by different scholars and educationists based on the perspectives from which they look at the word. This, as believed in some quarters, does not mean that the word is nebulous but as earlier state, based on how individual scholars perceive the word. For the sake and nature of this paper, I will only want to look at few definitions of the word. To Fafunwa (1974), education is the aggregate of all the processes through which a child develops abilities, and other forms of behaviours which are of positive value to the society while Okafor (1981), conceptualizes it as a process of acculturation by which individual is assisted to attain the maximum activation of his potentialities according to the right reason, and to thereby achieve his self-fulfillment or self-realization.

Aloefuna (2012) observes that education connotes the production and reproduction of knowledge and people's way of life (i.e. their culture) with the aim of preserving and maintaining the social structure that will be able to guarantee social order and changes in the society. All these definitions above show that education is generally concerned with the process of formally and informally facilitating learning by which knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits of a group of people are transferred to other people, through story-telling, discussion, teaching, training, or research.

Secondary Education

Secondary education occupies a very strategic position in any nation's educational system. Simply put, it is the education children receive after primary education and before the tertiary stage. In other words, it is a kind of education

system that comes between primary and tertiary levels of education. The development of secondary education in Nigeria could be traced back to the activities of the Christian Missionaries in 1859 with the establishment of CMS Grammar School in Lagos (Abiri and Jekayinfa, 2010). The recognition of secondary education as the gateway to tertiary education has led to the establishment of many public and private secondary schools in Nigeria. Schools publicly or privately owned have witnessed stupendous development over the years. This development is related to an increase in human and material resources.

Aims and Objectives of Secondary Education

The aims and objectives of secondary education as spilt out in the National Policy on Education (2004) include:

a. To provide all primary school leavers with the opportunity for education of a higher level, irrespective of sex, social status, religious or ethnic background;
b. To offer diversified curriculum to cater for the difference in talents, opportunities and future role;
c. To provide trained man power in the applied sciences, technology and commerce at sub-professional grades;
d. To develop and promote Nigerian languages, art and culture in the context of world's cultural heritage;
e. To inspire students with a desire for self-improvement and achievement of excellence; and
f. To raise a generation of people who can thank for themselves, respect the views of and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labour, appreciate these values specified under our broad national goals and we as good citizens…… (pp. 18-19).

National Integration

National integration, according to Iyamu and Osaigbwo (2002) in Ibrahim and Adeniyi (2019), is the process through which different ethnic groups that have been living independent of one another, or that have a close social, economic and political relationships come together with the aim of forming united, indivisible country. Integration in a multi-cultural entity like Nigeria remains a core value for socio-political, economic and technological development. Integration is viewed as bringing people or objects together in such a way that they have sense of belonging to the same destiny.

According to Okobsah (1984) in Obi (2008), integration is a state or condition of an organization or substance and interactive adjustments of the physiological, physical, emotional and mutual process with the environment. Such interactive process results in a state generally free from incessant and needless conflicts.

Okene (2010) defines integration as the satisfaction of the various components of a social polity with regards to justices, fairplay, equitable distribution

of resources and ability to access the accruing national opportunities. According to Coleman and Rosberg (1973) in Okene (2010), national integration connotes progressive lessening of ethnic, cultural and regional tensions in the process of creating a homogenous political community.

When applied to a nation, integration means harmonious perceptions, personal adjustment of the individuals to the standards, demands and responsibilities of the society of which he is a part and where he lives. Obi (2008) is of the assertion that national integration is attitudinal in form and perceptual in contents.

National integration, according to Isaac and Tijani (2010), is characterized by mutual understanding and commitment to socio-civic responsibilities for harmonious living with a view to achieving accelerated developments. It involves learning and understanding other people's way of life and perceiving it as superior as one's cultural heritage. It nullifies any form of discrimination against cultural values of other people. Thus, the underlying principles of national integration is genuine socio-cultural interdependency which enhances interpersonal relation among the multi ethnic groups of the Nigerian society.

As contained in the aims and objectives of Secondary education, integration gives room for sharing of socio-cultural values and traits such like language, marriage and other cultural values. Summaringly put, national integration embraces/cannotes behavioral pattern that can ensure absolute security and rapid political and economic transformation in a heterogeneous nation like Nigeria.

Nation

According to Anifowose and Enomuo (2008), 'state' and 'nation' are sometimes used interchangeably. They posited that the word 'nation' has two distinct meanings: (1) a political unit (a state) or (2), an ethnological unit (a race).

A nation, in the political sense, is a sovereign state, having a definite territory, a population, a government, formal independence and a sense of national identity. In the ethnological sense, nation is commonly defined as a group of people who form a distinct community by inhabiting a definite territory and recognize themselves as possessing a relatively homogenous set of cultural traits which include: a common or related blood, a common language, a common religion, a common historical tradition, and common customs and habits.

Looking at the definition of a nation from ethnological perspective, a nation may be pervaded by a sense of nationalism. This is simply because they see themselves as one (i.e. a race) with relationship by ties of consanguinity (i.e blood or birth).

Anifowose and Enemuo (2008:93) contended that, not all the above ingredients need to be present among a people to produce the spirits of nationalism (i.e a sense of belonging to a homogeneous, unified group). A nation needs not necessarily be a state. The modern state is hence not always a homogeneous nation. It may be multi-national in composition, that is, it may contain national minorities or ethnic groups who may exist, simply as a social group, cherishing its own social

manners and customs, its own particular language or dialect and its own particular form of religious worship. Examples include: Switzerland and Great Britain.

Analyzing the above extract, Nigeria can only become a nation-state when the people think of themselves as a nation where there is a strong emphasis on the consciousness of unity, rational loyalty and identity among its people.

Government's Efforts towards National Integration

Successive administrations in Nigeria have made several attempts towards the realization of national integration based on the importance attached to it. Those efforts include putting in place some institutions, features, signs and symbols.
Some of these efforts as noted by Ibrahim and Adeniyi (2019) include:

1. Formulation of the national objectives in the 2nd National Development Plan (1970 – 1974) at the end of the civil war in 1970 where every effort is geared towards national reconstitution, rehabilitation, reconstruction and integration.
2. The use of the national symbols like coats of arms and national currency to promote unity and sense of belonging.
3. The establishment of National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) to bring together, Nigerian youths from different socio-cultural and religious background.
4. The establishment of unity schools (Federal Government Colleges) to make the potential of making Nigerian youths to meet people of different cultures for the promotion of national integration.
5. Adoption of Federal character and the quota system in government and appointments to promote representation and unification of all Nigerians
6. The emphasis in the National Policy on Education on the teaching of English language and some Nigerian languages in schools promotes national understanding and integration.
7. The use of sports through National Sports Festivals, football league, promotes oneness and love in Nigeria
8. The establishment of a Federal Army, Police and other securities for the federation and defence of the nation.

Benefits Inherent in National Integration

The continuous peaceful coexistence of Nigeria has the potential to realize the following benefits which include:

1. In the era of democratic governance, integration provides a platform for cultural stability and solidarity required for the emergence of a competent and reliable leadership to put both natural and human resources to effective use.
2. It also creates room for cross ventilation of ideas, beliefs, values and tradition needed for harmonious living.

3. It enhances the realization of national security and political stability.
4. It improves the socialization process of the Nigerian children through their coming together
5. Also, it facilitates socio-economic activities across the nation which helps to a reasonable extent in poverty reduction in the Nigerian society.

Factors Working against National Integration

In spite of the various laudable efforts of the successive administration in Nigeria to achieve national integration, with a view to speeding national development of the country, there are some factors militating against the achievement of national integration. These include:

Illiteracy: Education is a powerful weapon through which the cultural diversities are welded together. It has the potential capacity to change one's barbaric perception about things, beliefs, and events. But in Nigeria, there is astronomically high number of illiterates.

Electoral Fraud: This involves manipulation of election result. People want to remain in leadership position by all means.

Multi-party system: As beautiful as multi-party system is in democratic governance, in Nigeria, it divides the major ethnic groups along party lines, thereby, jeopardizing national integration.

Inequality: Due to the wide gap between the rich and the poor, there are a lot of unrest, especially among the teeming unemployed graduates in the country. This is part of the reasons youth engaged in protests across the country in the year 2020 (End Sars protest). Others, according to Ibrahim and Adeniyi (2019) include:

Ethnicity: This is the exhibition of a strong and natural feeling towards people of the same tribe. It is a major problem threatening national integration in Nigeria.

Religious intolerance: This involves Christians and Muslims, most especially. It is otherwise regarded as inter religious conflicts which has led and is still leading to massive loss of lives and property in many parts of the country.

Unfair Distribution of Infrastructures: Most of Nigerian leaders are ethnic biased when it comes to distribution of amenities for the betterment of lives of the citizens. This forces those that perceive unfair treatment to continue to agitate for secession which constitutes a great threat to national integration.

Secondary Schools Education and National Integration

Secondary school education, as earlier defined, refers to the education that

children receive after primary education. In other words, it is education system that comes between primary and secondary education. This educational system occupies a very strategic position in the overall development of the nation.

Considering the age group of the learners involved in this level of education, learning at this level of education goes beyond mere accumulation of facts, concepts, theories and generalization but rather internalization and effective utilization of the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values acquired in the school to solve life outside classroom challenges. In other words, learners at this level of schooling are expected to apply what they have learnt in classroom which is tune with the aims and objectives of the (secondary school) education to life outside school. The role of secondary education to national integration is of inestimable value. Government, realizing the importance of secondary school education in the integration of ethnically, religiously and culturally divergent citizens, took measures in establishing unity schools (i.e Federal Government Colleges) in all the senatorial districts of Nigeria with the aim of raising a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views of and feelings of others, respect dignity of labour, appreciate these values as specified in the broad national goals.

The rationale behind the establishment of these unity schools (secondary education) is to create awareness and inculcate in Nigerian children the idea of unity in diversity for the rapid socio-economic development of the nation. Thus, it inculcates interdependence which allows the individual learners to positively interact with one another and share a sense of belonging to a common heritage and common destiny.

Since integration is a requisite to national development, National policy of Education (2004), as spelt out in the aims and objectives of secondary education, states that secondary education is to provide all primary school leavers with the opportunity for education of a higher level, i.e secondary education, irrespective of sex, social status, religious or ethnic background.

It is a known fact that national integration is largely dependent on effective citizenry. Therefore, secondary education inculcates into the students worthwhile values which are fundamental to national integration. These include: spirit of tolerance, truthfulness, loyalty, co-operation, respects for constituted authorities, self-discipline, diligence, and other democratic values like national consciousness, commitment to national duties and obligations all which are taught in secondary education in the subjects like: Social studies, civic education, agricultural science, basic technology, history, geography etc.

Though, Nigeria, as a nation, possesses vast human and material resources, but all these resources are valueless without peaceful and harmonious co-existence among its people to harness and utilize the resources for the betterment of the citizens. Therefore, secondary education prepares the individual learners for healthy living to contribute to the development of Nigerian society through application of knowledge, skills, attitude, values etc which they learnt in the various subjects at the secondary level of education for national integration.

Conclusion

From the foregoing deliberation, establishment of secondary school education is not by chance but a well-thought plan aimed at bringing children, who are the leaders of tomorrow, together from different cultural and religious background for the attainment of national integration in Nigeria. Secondary education helps tremendously to make education socially functional and responsive to solve numerous obstacles in our collective development process where national integration fails. Therefore, governments at all levels should give proper attention to secondary education in the Nigerian educational system so that the distinctive values embedded in it can be used for the advancement of the nation.

Funding

(TETFund/DESS/COE/ILORIN/ARJ)

"TETFund Projects 2020-2022"

Recommendations

The following recommendations based on the discussion are made:

1. Secondary education should be properly funded to enable students have access to educational facilities.
2. Condition of service of the teachers must be improved to enable them put in their best
3. Government at all levels should provide job opportunities to teeming unemployed graduates to nib in the bud incessant crimes and violent protest which have divisive tendency.
4. Due to its social relevance, secondary school education should be made mandatory for all students to reduce the level of illiteracy among the people.

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