

EDUCATION AS A VERITABLE TOOL FOR NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN NIGERIA

By

EKECHUKWU, PETER CHIZOBA PhD

Department of Educational Foundations
University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Abstract

Nigeria, a land that is made up of people with diverse culture, religion and language. These challenges are responsible for the high level of under –development, economic stagnation, hatred, insecurity and high poverty rate. The issue of national integration as a measure to enhance unity of purpose, ideology and value system rests majorly on education. Education is expected to play a major role to produce transformed citizens and provide answers to disunity, cultural and religious divisions in Nigeria. This paper therefore focused on education and national integration for growth and development, with the review of the concept of education and national integration, Nigeria’s philosophy of education and objectives, role of education in National integration and challenges to using education for national integration. The study concluded that national integration is essential for national unity and progress. The researcher therefore suggested the following among others as the way forward: the government both federal and state should help our education system in order to promote national integration, school curriculum should be reviewed periodically to meet daily trends and government should have a regulatory body that monitors policy implementation in schools.

Introduction

At the time of Nigeria’s independence in 1960, there was much excitement and expectation in the land as a result of a new dawn. Our leaders at the time, who worked so hard for our freedom, had in mind, the picture of a great nation, united people from different socio-cultural background, as well as a progressive nation. Unfortunately, these have not been the case. Today in Nigeria, things have gone really wrong. The nation is more divided than ever and serious tension abounds, owing mainly to leadership failures.

The rate of social vices has escalated. There are more ethnic colorations in the scheme of things in the country; be it in politics, work, school, and so on. There are high rate of kidnapping, killings, cultism, nepotism, banditry, corruption, ethnic violence, money laundering, etc (Amaele, 2015). Our strength of unity is currently undergoing acid test. Politics has almost killed Nigeria. The hope of our nation presently lies in her education as an instrument that can aid true national integration.

Concept of Education

Education as a concept is construed differently by scholars who attempt to define it from their own point of views. Education implies a process of acquiring knowledge and the theory of teaching and learning. Peters (1979) defined education as a process of socialization,

enculturation and transmission of what is worthwhile to those who are committed to it; be it children or adults. This shows that those who go through education want to improve themselves. Okafor in Oputa (2010) sees education 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 his perfect self-fulfillment. Education is also considered as a deliberate, systematic and sustained effort to transmit, evoke or acquire knowledge, values, attitudes and skills. It is the art of making available to each generation, the organized knowledge of the past. Education is a life long project; which starts from one's birth and ends at one's death.

Any education that cannot promote a change in an individual's life or society is not an education. Education is expected to produce positive changes both in people's lives and society in general. As Zik observed, education should impart in individuals both academic and practical skills with which they can control their destinies. Also, education helps one to learn of one's past, present, and prepares one for the future. In the process, experiences are garnered, bad habits dropped, and a new way of viewing things emerges (Osaat & Oputa, 2018).

Furthermore, education should build in individuals the spirit of critical thinking which can be applied in handling issues in the society. Critical thinking encompasses the use of cognitive skills for interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation and self regulation. It is easier for a society to experience more progress, enlargement and integration when its citizens apply regularly 'critical thinking' in what they do.

National Integration

Integration means the bringing together of many different parts so that they can function as a whole. It is seen by the Sociology Guide (2019) as a process of developing a society in which all the social groups share the socio-economic and cultural life. This could imply having and enjoying the societal wealth together. The Wikipedia (2019) also defines social integration as the process during which newcomers or minorities are incorporated into the social structure of the host society. In this respect, new persons are free to migrate into an existing society and enjoy their socio-economic and cultural values together. This concept is seen as national integration when a nation is involved.

Hence, national integration is that feeling of togetherness or oneness towards ones' own country irrespective of people's individual differences with regard to religion, tribe, region, race, or culture. Quora (2019) adds that national integration is not only about national spirit but involves a deep feeling that brings peoples from all areas, dialects and beliefs together in a common endeavour. This attitude helps individuals to work together and build systems that enhance the prosperity of a nation and its people.

National integration further implies the avoidance of divisive movements or activities/practices that would disrupt a nation's harmony and prosperity. Wanagho (2011) equates it with oneness. He believes that national integration helps in bringing together different ethnic groups to have a single voice for the collective development and growth of a region, and by extension, the nation, Nigeria. Such development will be seen in a better society where true

democratic practice as in good governance, respect for rule of law, respect for people's rights, accountability and freedom of speech as well as collective responsibilities is experienced or is in place (Bebibiafai, 2015). It also includes the provision of social amenities like good roads, electricity, pipe borne water, and other infrastructure as well as creation of jobs for the unemployed.

National integration indices in any society therefore include:

- Rights of every citizens to vote and be voted for.
- Health facilities and other social amenities for all.
- Job opportunities/ appointments open for all.
- Access to any school of one's choice.
- Good governance
- Rule of law
- Freedom of worship, etc.

National integration thus, becomes the panacea for national segregation, oppression and suppression. Nigeria currently needs to build on her national integration due to dissenting voices. Many are crying of neglect of their areas and intentional societal injustice by ruling political class. Political positions are now based on the party one belongs (Nwaokugha, 2018). Projects are deliberately abandoned in states due to political affiliations. As example is the eat-west road in Port Harcourt area of Rivers State which is a sorry sight and the masses made to suffer. Groups like 'Biafra' 'IPOB', Niger Delta Militants', 'Boko Haram', 'Revolution Save Nigeria' among others have emerged with one claim or the other inflicting pains on the citizens of the country.

The masses are suffering due to hardship in the land. There are little or no jobs even for Ph.D holders how much less first degree holders. This is one of the reasons people enter into cults with the erroneous notion of making it, some join politics with the mind of enriching themselves to the detriment of others, some are now in yahoo business, direct robbery or prostitution among others just to survive.

Worst is the ethnic and religious divide where some claim to come from a certain part of the country or belong to one religion or the other. This is why there has to be an awakening by our leaders to stop this madness. It is suggested that education through values orientation should be used in this direction. Values education is the planned educational action targeted at the development of appropriate attitudes, values, emotions and behavior patterns of the learners (Venkataiah, 2007). It has a wide meaning and encompasses all aspects of personality development intellectual, social, moral, aesthetic and spiritual. It is an approach to inculcate broad mindedness, tolerance and proper social and emotional qualities. Applied in its broad sense, values education aims at training the young in the entire realm of values-physical, emotional, intellectual, imaginative, aesthetic, democratic, scientific, social, moral and spiritual (Emenu, 2015). These can be pursued by any individual irrespective of his practice of any religion or no religion at all.

Nigeria's National Philosophy and Goals

According to Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013), the overall philosophy of Nigeria is to:

- a) Live in unity and harmony as one indivisible, indissoluble, democratic and sovereign nation founded on the principles of freedom, equality and justice;
- b) Promote inter-African solidarity and world peace through understating.

Consequently, the five main goals of Nigeria Philosophy; which has been accepted as the fulcrum for the National Policy on Education are:

1. A free and democratic society.
2. A just and egalitarian society.
3. A united, strong and self-reliant nation.
4. A great and dynamic economy.
5. A land of bright and full opportunities for her citizens.

The first goal of Nigeria's philosophy talks about a free and democratic society. Every citizen in Nigeria has the right of freedom since Nigeria is no more under colonialization. Also, Nigeria is one of the democratic nations in the whole world. This means that just as the individuals have the right of freedom, we as a nation also have the right to democracy and should enjoy its benefits. For instance, we should be able to choose who would rule us without violence. The rights of citizens in social welfare including education should not be denied them.

The second goal of our nation's philosophy talks about a just and egalitarian society. Nigeria should be able to practice true justice and create an enabling environment for oneness. There should be no inequality or discrimination amongst us.

The third national goal talks about a united, strong and self-reliant nation, the spirit of unity should dwell amongst us; the cooperative spirit should help us make our nation what we want it to be.

The fourth national goal is on a great and dynamic economy. The nation is blessed with rich mineral resources such as oil, tin, coal; and agricultural products like cocoa, rice, cassava, etc. which if properly channeled can really give us a dynamic economy. This is our desire. And the fifth national goal tells of a land full of bright and equal opportunity for her citizens. All Nigerians have the right to benefit from all the opportunities God has given us such as education and wealth.

Nigeria's Philosophy of Education and Objectives

Nigeria's Philosophy of Education is spelt in four areas which are:

- a) Education is an instrument for national development; to this end, the formulation of ideas, their integration for national development, and the interaction of persons and ideas are all aspects of education;
- b) Education fosters the worth and development of the individual, for each individual's sake, and for the general development of the society.
- c) Every Nigeria child shall have a right to equal educational opportunities irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities each according to his or her ability.

- d) There is need for functional education for the promotion of a progressive, united Nigeria; to this end, school programmes need to be relevant, practical and comprehensive; while interest and ability should determine the individual's direction in education.

Therefore, the philosophy of education in Nigeria is spelt in these objectives:

- 1) To inculcate national consciousness and unity.
- 2) To inculcate right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society.
- 3) The training of the mind in the understanding of the world around.
- 4) The acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities, and competences – both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of his society.

Objective number one of Nigeria's Philosophy of education is to inculcate national consciousness and unity among Nigerians. The government over the years has undertaken different steps in achieving the above. Examples of such steps include the national anthem which should be recited with meaning, our national flag, promotion of three major Nigerian languages – Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo nationwide, introducing National Youth Service Corps Scheme where young graduates are expected to undergo National Service for a year in different areas of the country, etcetera.

Objective two talks about right type of values which include belief in God, respect for one another, respect for industriousness, love for people among others. These should be reflected in our way of life.

The third objective is about training the mind in the understanding of the world around. School graduates are expected to be well equipped through their programme so that they can compete anywhere and make useful contributions wherever and make useful contributions wherever they find themselves.

Objective number four is the acquisition of right skills, abilities and competences –both mental and physical. These among others are the things education should ensure. Our education system should be such that our students are adequately equipped with skills before they graduate. Such skills and abilities are needed in today's challenging world.

Sadly, it appears these objectives are not functioning. The solution nevertheless, lies in our school. It depends on the idea of education we have i.e what our students are being taught.

Role of Education in National Integration

First, education has aims. Some of them are:

- Moral and spiritual development of persons.
- Intellectual training/development of person.
- Transmission of cultural values.
- Knowledge about the environment and anything relating to human endeavour.
- Acquisition of various skills for purposeful living.

- Development of worthwhile attitudes, values and behaviours.
- Developing the rational mind of man.
- Inter-personal and human relationship (Enoch, 2009).
Second, education has some functions which include:
 - Maintenance of social solidarity by developing in children a sense of belonging to the society with a commitment to its way of life as they understand it.
 - Inculcation of values and standards of the society.
 - Development of knowledge. The provision of literacy and numeracy and specialized training for occupational competence leading to personal and societal fulfillment.
 - Transmission of knowledge (worthwhile knowledge) which comprises the social heritage.
 - The preservation and transmission of cultural values from one generation to another.
 - Expansion of student's intellectual ability.
 - Encouraging democratic participation through teaching verbal skills and the development of individual's ability for rational thinking.
 - The production of patriotic citizens through lessons by illustrating the nation's greatness and glory.
 - Education is an agent of upward mobility in the society.
 - Education is also an agent of socio-cultural change.

Thirdly, education should teach people their rights which are fundamental to them. Such fundamental human rights according to Omoregbe (1993) are:

- 1) The right to exist or the right to live;
- 2) The right to bodily integrity;
- 3) The right to freedom, i.e. self-determination;
- 4) The right to self-expression;
- 5) The right to own property within certain limits;
- 6) The right to marry and have children;
- 7) The right to education;
- 8) The right to a just wage for one's labour;
- 9) The right to be treated with justice;
- 10) The right to good name;
- 11) The right to belong to any religion, i.e. the right to freedom of worship; and
- 12) The right to form any society or organization if such a society or organization does not constitute a threat to public peace and security and does not infringe on the rights of other.

Also, education should promote:

1. Respect for persons.
2. True democratic principles like justice and fairness, rule of law, accountability, freedom of speech, etc.
3. Respect for people's way of worship.
4. Unity and oneness

5. Peace and liberty
6. Honesty and hardwork
7. Creativity
8. Cultural values

In addition, education should discourage division, violence, cultism, kidnapping, among others. All these evil vices should stop.

Challenges to using education for national integration

Such challenges include:

1. **Kind of education offered:** A major challenge Nigerian education faces presently is the kind of education it offers. In other words, the quality of our education compared to other countries. Nigerian universities for instance were built by the federal government to seek the truth through the development of knowledge and manpower. They are also being funded by the government to help in the scientific and technological advancement of the society as well as in its material and cultural development. However, have these objectives been achieved? What kind of knowledge do we impart on our students? Are the rich cultural values Nigeria boasts of such as love, tolerance, and respect still there? Why do we still have cases of cultism, kidnapping, violence, etc amongst us? Are our students still proud of their root? Do we have good research centres in our universities which will help in solving our social, cultural and political problems? Do we have a national ideology which our philosophy of education is based on? With the present system in Nigeria education, can we go anywhere? What is the hope of the average Nigeria student? Notable scholars like Okoli (2011) among others have frowned at the type of education Nigeria currently offers and have called for a drastic change.

2. **Limited funding:** The issue of funding has been greatly discussed among educationists and scholars in general. Funding entails financial backing/support to schools (in this context) by the government. The Federal Government funds federal institutions while each state government funds her own State educational institutions. Funding also means that there is money for research and teaching, development of physical structure, staff salaries, equipment-laboratories and libraries, conducive classrooms for lectures, steady power supply, and working ICT facilities (Aminigo & Osaat, 2015).

A lot of resources is required to establish and run schools of international repute these days. Unfortunately, it does appear our schools are presently underfunded; making many to frown. Statistics shows that the federal government has been spending only 1.6 percent of the country's yearly Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on public university education in the last 18 years. Also, only approximately 10% of total annual budget has been going to education for the past 17 years. Some have also questioned the rationale behind much money going to Federal government, State and Local government and few spent on education. For instance, in the 2017 Nigeria budget proposals sent to the National Assembly by Mr. President, ₦7.3 trillion was earmarked out of which only ₦398.01 billion was kept for education recurrent expenditure (Opejobi, 2016). This falls short of UNESCO 26% budget recommendation for

developing countries such as Ghana (31%), Cote d'Ivoire (31%), South Africa (25.6%), Kenya (23%) among others.

There is the general belief that the federal government is not funding our universities enough. Where schools are not properly funded, it could lead to dearth of school infrastructure and serious academic implications. Also, one may be tempted to ask if the exact amount from the budget allocation for education released by government is actually spent by school authorities judiciously in the end.

However, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU, 2000) believes that adequate funding of universities will lead to.

- 1) Equipping of laboratories, building libraries, providing academic and social conditions that are conducive to living and learning in the university campuses;
- 2) Providing a firm foundation for the restoration of the past glory of Nigeria universities;
- 3) Attracting back to Nigeria most academics that left the universities out of dissatisfaction with the conditions of service and frustration about the poverty of academic facilities in Nigeria;
- 4) Retraining academics already in the system and also encouraging the best graduates to join the academic (teaching) profession;
- 5) Placing the universities in a good position to seriously compete with other universities in the world in the race for the production of knowledge for development and freedom.

3. **Use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT):** Education today has undergone rapid transformation globally due to the help of modern technologies. These innovative technologies apply technological tools, devices, softwares and hardwares, teaching methods among others in bringing practical solutions to teaching and learning problems. ICT has made teaching and learning look simple. Both the teacher and student can now apply ICT in their activities making education more interesting. It is sad however, that the concept of ICT in Nigeria is still new or has not been fully utilized. Majority of the teaching staff and students in Nigeria schools are still grasping with ICT and its related application due to insufficient computer knowledge and applications. Hence, these ones are denied the enormous benefits emanating from ICT. How can students be exposed to ICT world if they are not taught or properly guided about it. Some schools do not have ICT facilities. Some that have do not have the expertise that can handle it, allowing those facilities to rot. For some who have the resource personnel, their knowledge of it is limited. Only few schools can boast of sound ICT experts.

The non-teaching staff who run day-to-day administration of the school are not excluded. The world today has been taken over by technology and every academic institution be it primary school, secondary school, or the university should key into the use of ICT. Whether we like it or not, everyone in today's world should imbibe the virtues of ICT. This view is corroborated by Inyang and Ijomah (2015) in their respective work on Information and Communication Technology.

4. **Admission/Access to schools:** Gaining admission into Nigeria universities for instance, is not easy especially with the nation's large population compared with admission

rate owing to limited universities and infrastructure. So many people sit for Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) examination and at the end of the day are disappointed. Among these are those who have sat for years. Even when some candidates make the required scores, it is still a problem gaining admission. The university system appears to be making things difficult either in terms of cut-off points, quota system, aptitude test, admission fees, and so on. Candidates seeking admission into universities since year 200 have soared compared to those eventually accepted. In 2011/2012 a total of 1, 493, 604 people sat for JAMB with only 400,000 admitted, leaving the remaining over 1 million persons dejected. This is a picture of what happens every year. Interestingly, some students who are admitted are given a completely different course at the end of the day. Eventually, such students may begin to struggle with the courses available and when they manage to graduate, are useless in the society. This is a serious issue which must be tackled quickly in our university system.

5. **Cost of education:** Education in Nigeria is becoming very expensive everyday almost measuring with that of private universities in the country. It now takes the privileged few and the brave to attend public schools in Nigeria. School fees are too exorbitant. You can imagine an individual paying over ₦130,000 as school fees per section the average Nigerian workers? We have not even considered other financial obligations such as textbooks, library and hostel fees, feeding, etc. Some may attribute this trend to poor government funding but is the best we can say? This issue needs to be seriously addressed.

Solution

The following solutions are recommended:

- 1) The government (federal and state) should help our education system in order to promote national integration.
- 2) School curriculum should be reviewed periodically to meet daily trends.
- 3) School curriculum should inculcate true national values that promote integration.
- 4) Government should have a regulatory body that monitors policy implementation schools.
- 5) Government should have a regulatory body that monitors policy implementation in schools.
- 6) Students should learn to respect one another and see others as they see themselves. They should be taught to love their country.

Conclusion

National integration is very important for national unity and progress. No nation can excel if the citizens do not have one mind. Where people are divided, the nation suffers. Also, an enabling environment is needed for the advancement of a people. Thus, when such environment is provided, peace, security, progress and development are assured. It is the belief of these writers that this enabling environment/atmosphere as encapsulated in national integration can be achieved using the means of education.

References

Amaele, S. (2015). *Moral and religious values in Nigerian Education: Issues, problems and prospects*. Port Harcourt: Harey. Publications Coy.

- Aminigo, I.M. & Osaat, S.D. (2015). *Celebrating our teacher and mentor at 70: Essays in honour of Professor Joseph Donatus Okoh*. Port Harcourt: C'Fine publishers.
- Bebibiafai, I. A. (2015). Achieving democratic principle through practice of academic freedom in Nigeria universities. In I. M. Aminigo & S. D. Osaat (2015). *Celebrating our teacher and mentor at 70: Essay in honour of Professor Joseph Donatus Okoh*. Port Harcourt: C'Fine Publishers.
- Emenus, C.A. (2015). Values education: The greatest national need. In I. M. Aminigo & Osaat (eds) *Celebrating at teacher and mentor @70: Essays in honour of Prof. Joseph Donatus Okoh*. Port Harcourt: C'Fine Publishers.
- Enoh, A. O. (2009). *Education and leadership in Nigeria. Book of Reading*. Lagos: Philosophy of Education Association of Nigeria.
- Inyang, M. & Ijoma, M. (2015). ICT and research methodology. Unpublished work. University of Port Harcourt.
- Okoli, N.J. (2011). *History of education*. An overview. Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press.
- Omoregbe, J. (1993). Ethics
- Opejobi, S. (2016). 2017 budget presentation: Full text of President Buhari's speech. Daily Post Nigeria. Retrieved December 24, 2016.
- Opejobi, S. (2010). The quality of university education in Nigeria is declining: Factors responsible. University of Port Harcourt. *Unpublished work*.
- Osaat, S. D. & Oputa, C. C. (2018). A philosophical foundation of education for political stability in Nigeria. *A paper presented at the 38th Annual Conference of the Philosophers of Education Association of Nigeria*.
- Peters, R. S. (1979). *The concept of education*. London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul Limited.
- Quora (2019). What is national integration? www.quora.com
- Sociology Guide (2019). Integration. www.sociologygudie.com.
- Venkataiah, N. (2007). *Value education*. New Delhi: APH Publishing Corporation.
- Wanagho, J. M. (2011). Democracy and education in Nigeria. Unpublished work: University of Port Harcourt. Wikipedia (2019). National integration. www.wikipedia.org.