

VIABLE EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY, PEACE AND UNITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The British bequeathed to Nigeria the democratic governance system at the country's independence in 1960. The Nigerian leaders who took over the administration of the country from the British had a brief stay in office when the military seized power from them in January 1966 on allegation of many wrong doings against them. The military itself soon faltered; got caught in the web of internal division, social and political crises resulting in a devastating civil war which lasted for four years. Although the civil war ended in January 1970, the internal rivalry and lusts for power within the military caused their long stay in power till May 1999 with little break from 1979 to 1983. Arising from the long military rule and other related matters, democracy as presently operated in the country is beset with multiple challenges, including electoral violence, high unemployment and the consequent youth restiveness, insecurity of lives and property, inadequate or complete absence of basic amenities for good living. The system therefore, needs to be nurtured to develop its culture as an enduring institution to usher in an egalitarian society of peace and development. It is in this context that viable education is required for building the institutions and society as well as the persons that are imbued with the value and drive concomitant of democratic culture. This forms the focus of this paper. The method adopted is qualitative. The work recommends among others introduction of some courses at the different levels of education

Keywords: Viable Education, sustainable, Democracy, unity, peace

Out of the total sixty two years Nigeria has stayed as an independent state, the military ruled about the same length of period with the civilians. Beside their direct stay in power for that long, the military has dominated the civil rule having two of its retired officers, Olusegun Obasanjo and Muhammadu Buhari as Presidents, serving eight years each. Many other retired officers of the military have also held political positions among others, as governors, ministers, diplomats, legislators etc. The Nigerian democracy has, therefore, not only been short lived but has operated more or less as pseudo or quasi democratic system. What ought to be civil rule has turned out a hybrid of the military and civil culture and orientation, bearing features of dictatorship and unfair mode of access to power built around the ex-military officers who have the means, including

influence, to acquire political positions directly for themselves, their friends and relations. The emerged structure comprises a small but powerful wealthy dominant group over the majority. It is now common to see members of the group rotate positions from governorship to ministerial and legislative positions.

One main area of failure of the military in their initial take-over of the administration of the country was their loyalty to ethnicity. It was the primary cause of disunity that existed among the leaders of the first republic and the consequent violence that occurred in the polity. Unfortunately the military failed to live above it and it caused the second or what was referred to as the 'counter coup' or 'rematch' against the first military head of state. It was alleged that the first coup was led or carried out by officers of the Igbo extraction who did not only produce the head of state but also ensured that no politician of their nativity was killed while the other major ethnic groups namely the Hausa-Fulani and the Yoruba lost some leaders in the coup. The first coup was led by Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu and Emmanuel Ifeajuna. (Metz, 2021) Though it failed, "22 people were killed in the coup, including the Prime Minister, many politicians, top military officers (including their wives) and sentinels on protective duty" (Ibid)

The second coup which occurred in July 1966 and produced a head of state from the Northern part of the country was led Murtala Muhammed backed by some other young officers from the North and was termed a correction of the first one, (Omoigui, 2017. The plotters of the second coup alleged among other things like the unification Decree; rumours of an "Igbo coup", the promotion of many Igbo Majors to Colonels, rumours of General Aguiyi Ironsi's favouritism towards the Igbos (Sioliun, 2009, 237).

The controversy within the military that trailed the coup resulted in the civil war (Boxter, P 2015). Attempts were made for a genuine reconciliation to erase scares of the war through the program of Reconciliation, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction put in place by the federal government to grant succor to the war victims, the Igbos. Nevertheless it is not difficult to know today that memories of the war are still very fresh in the mind of the affected people the, Igbos as we herechoes of the war resounding loud and clear to our ears. The demand for the state of Biafra, though about the most pronounced in ethnic chauvinism in Nigeria, many other ethnic groups in the country in recent times have demonstrated unusual loyalty to their groups. The reasons for this renewed expression of sentiment are response to the wave of killings and heightened herders- farmers clashes which tend to suggest that a particular ethnic group is being encouraged or rather shielded from sanctions in its acts of hostility towards other groups. The same have led to demands for state security architecture, including state police. Nigeria in recent times has faced more challenges in her quest at building a nation out of the multi ethnic collectivities.

Related to the above is the increasing insecurity of lives and property aggravated by mounting unemployment, high inflation, shortages of basic amenities, growing incidences of kidnapping and armed robbery which are all blamed on the poor

performance of the government. Analysts and the general public have questioned the governance system which they have faulted on grounds of its structure and overall performance.

Given this antecedence, the democratic governance has in-built anti-democratic elements of autocracy which disrupt the process. The system of government though federal by concept, is centralized with much of the powers and instruments of collection and allocation of resources of the commonwealth residing with the federal government. There have been calls by the sub national governments—the states and local government councils for a review of the relevant sections of the constitution for devolution of powers to enable those lower levels of government render services to the people as the governments closest to them. The point has been stressed that the centralized system of government has not allowed for equitable distribution of the commonwealth and appointment into offices.

Discussion of concepts

Education

What is education? The term education, defies a single definition. It has been variously defined but commonly associated with development, change, innovation and the like. A simple definition of education sees it as “a learning process for the individual to attain knowledge and understanding of the higher specific—.The knowledge gained formally resulting in the individuals has a pattern of thought and behaviour in accordance with the education they received” <https://examlainnig.com.definitti>

Education holds its origin to the Latin words “educare” and “educere” meaning to bring out or to nourish (Gyankosh 2015). Taken further, education by the interpretation means to bring out from the learner that which is inside of him to achieve his goals. It is believed that every person, the child learner for that matter, has potentialities inside of him which education helps him to bring out and develop. The innate potentialities are to be harnessed or tapped from the child’s birth and nurtured from infancy through his growth and development. Education thus brings out the innate qualities packaged in the personality of the individual.

Notable education philosophers are very strong in their views on this. Rousseau (quoted in Gyankosh 2015) said Education is the child’s development from within” To Plato, “Education develops in the body and soul of the pupil all the beauty and all the perfection he is capable of”(Ibid). Yet, Froebel said “Education is the unfoldment of what is already enfolded in the gene. It is the process through which the child makes the internal external”(Ibid). To Mahatma Ghandi, “By education, I mean an all round drawing out of the best in the child and man—body, mind and spirit” (Ibid). Still on this view, T P Nunn opined that “Education is the complete development of the individuality of the child so that he can make an original contribution to human life according to his capacity”(ibid)

Education on the other hand, undertakes the task of helping to realize the type of society desired by creating in the individuals the orientation for achieving the goals of the society. The education offered in such circumstance centers on the society to the subordination of the individual needs. On this, John Dewey, an education Philosopher said “All education proceeds by the participation of the individual in the social consciousness of the race” (<https://lep.utm.ed>dewey>). Dewey was a pragmatist as well as a democrat who believed in the participation of the student in the process of learning. This introduces the learner to the rudiment of participation in the affairs of the community and the society. And Kautilya stated that “Education means training for the country and the love for the nation” (<https://lep.utm.ed>dewey>)

The context in which education is discussed in this work agrees with both the views of the philosophers who have seen education from the point of the need of the individual and those who viewed it from the need of the society. If education is to help to produce the type of democracy and by extension governance system it must also impact those who are to be leaders in the society. “Education develops the individual, his attitude and perception of his environment; to contribute his efforts for the social, political, cultural and economic changes in his society” (Iyayi, 2009 quoted in Bello-Imam P.215)

However, the education to drive the democracy to usher in peace, unity and development has been described as viable. What is viable education? The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary (1994) has given the meaning of the word “viable” as “sound and workable, feasible”. It also means in biological term, “capable of developing or surviving independently”. And according to Collins English Dictionary, something that is viable is capable of doing what it is intended to do. Viable education therefore is high quality education that will offer knowledge on what the society desires, in this instance democracy. It is to serve as means for training individuals and building institutions as well as creating a society to grow, support and nurture the democracy to survival. Drivers of the democracy should be selfless, transparent, truly nationalistic and live above boards. Therefore, the education to serve the purpose should offer a break with the past, be transformative, and resilient to withstand the assault of followers of the old order. It should be popular and robust in curricular to provide for accommodation of the ethno-cultural diversities of the country.

Democracy

It is a system of government that allows people’s participation not only for the choice of their rulers but also in the running of the government. Common features of democracy are, among others: laid down rules for choosing rulers in free and fair elections, recognition and protection of rights of the citizens, participation of citizens in the running of government and fair judicial system (Bello-Imam).

Democracy is alien to this part of the world, traceable in origin to the Greek city states (and later popularized by the provisions of the Westphalia Treaty of 1648 which

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itself was based on JeoanBodin's philosophy that recognized the sovereignty of states and the right of the citizens to the power of the state. "Democracy originated from two Greek words –demos, meaning 'people' and kratos'power' or 'rule'. The two words put together formed 'demokrata' meaning 'rule of the people', which represents the political system that existed in Athens, the Greek City State in the 5th century BC" (Iyayi, 2019 quoted in Terhemba Wuam, 2019, 89)

What is required is sustainable democracy. For democracy to be sustainable, it must contain the elements and features of democracy as already mentioned above and well practiced governance system. The ultimate is good governance which shares common features with democracy. Such features include observance of rule of law, unlimited space for human rights and freedom of expression, accountability and transparency, strong institutions for conduct of free and fair elections and active participation of the people in the affairs of government (Bello-Imam. The system should be such that it can accommodate diverse views and transit administrations through credible elections. Perhaps most important is that the government effectively discharges its responsibilities to the people by providing for them the amenities required for good living and equal access to the commonwealth. These indicators of good governance serve as assurances to the people that the government cares for them

Peace

Peace is absence of trouble, crisis or conflict. Peace can be relative to individuals in their private or public lives. It can, on the other hand, be the state of things in community, society or state. In the context we are using it in this discourse it refers to the state of inter-personal and inter group or ethnic relationship in the entire country.

Nigeria since her independence in 1960 has not actually enjoyed peace. She has witnessed crises of different types, including religious, political and ethnic crises. A few years after gaining independence as earlier mentioned, she was engulfed in political crisis arising from conduct of elections. The crisis featured ballot box snatching, killings, arson etc causing the overthrow of the first civilian government by the military. Following that was the ethnic dimension of the crisis and the civil war on the attempt by the Igbos in the South East region of the country to secede.

There was the Maitatsine religious riot of the 1980s. It resulted in the mass movement of Christians, particularly the Igbos from the North to the South. In the view of Adesoji, (2011), the poor handling of this riot caused the religious riot revival in what is today Boko Haram. Boko Haram crisis started as a protest group but later assumed the status of terrorist organization with international affiliations. At a time between 2013 and 2017 they had occupied not fewer than twenty one local government areas in the North East region of Nigeria. The group adopts various tactics for their operation, including adoption of their victims, outright killing, arson and the like, resulting in the death of thousands of civilians and military personnel in the battle with them. Other thousands of indigenes have been forced out of their ancestral locations, now in Internally Displaced

Camps (IDPs) or in other parts of the country. Boko Haram terrorists have remained a big security challenge to the government and people of Nigeria.

Related to the Boko Haram terrorists are the bandits who organize sporadic attacks on innocent people in their homes or on roads on journeys. They kill, maim and abduct their victims on whom they demand huge sums as ransom for their release. They are deadly and growing in number all over the country though more in the Northern part.

Still related to the above is the crime of kidnapping. The crime though not new in the world started in Nigeria not quite long. In Nigeria, it started in the Niger Delta region as part of the activities of the militants in the area taking the oil workers hostage to press for attention of the government of Nigeria and the international community for development in the region. The ploy began in the 1990s in the region and became a lucrative venture for the militants as the hostages were released to their companies or federal government after payment of huge sums of money” (Iyayi, 2019). The crime gradually spread to other parts of the country and it is growing per day

Armed robbery came as part of the ills left behind by the civil war in Nigeria. The war caused the possession of illegal weapons by people within and outside the military. The evil minded among these persons went about robbing with the illegal weapons. The first cases of robbery occurred during and immediately after the civil war.

Then the farmers –herder’s clashes which though started very long time ago, sometime in the 20th century, outside Nigeria, have recently assumed very alarming proportion in Nigeria. The conflict gradually crept into Nigeria and by 1970s caused concern in some parts of the country but not sufficient to create anxiety for the federal government unlike what it is today. The states mostly affected by this conflict are Benue, Taraba, and Plateau in the North Central Zone of the country. Factors that have recently exacerbated the conflict are “--deteriorating environmental conditions, desertification and soil degradation, population growth, breakdown of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms of land and water disputes: and proliferation of small arms and crime in rural areas. Insecurity and violence have led many populations to create self-defense forces and ethnic and tribal militias, which have engaged in further violence” ([http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/quote in Iyayi, 2019](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/quote_in_Iyayi_2019))

Another dimension of the activities of the herdsmen in recent time is their involvement in kidnapping, arson, sexual assault on women, which are of such high proportion as to be given a political interpretation

The point has been made that these crimes have common causes which are traceable to poor governance system and the resultant failure of government to render social obligations to the people. For instance the rising incidences of youths’ involvement in cyber crime popularly referred to as yahoo and the associated ritual killings are traceable to un-employment. The same explanation goes for the emergence of Boko Haram which started as a protest by the youths.

The Niger Delta Militants rose against what they saw as an unfair treatment to their region that produces the oil that accounts for over 90% of the country’s revenue yet

has nothing to show for it. Oil exploration has degraded their environment, rendered their farm land and fishing water unproductive. In addition they lack the basic amenities such as potable water for drinking, health care, good roads, electricity supply etc.

Unity

Unity has been so much preached in Nigeria yet proves elusive. The reason is the inability to move the various ethnic groups beyond the level of mutual suspicion to build a united country. Much has been said about this above high-lighting the imbalance in the constitutional functions and responsibilities of the different federating units and the consequent unfair allocations of resources. Issues of unity have been more of rhetoric than real. The current administration for instance is bears feature of nepotism in appointment. Successive governments from their actions seem to merely indulge in rhetoric rather than acting as real drivers of forces of cohesion thus making the issue of nation building look secondary.

Theoretical Framework

The theory discussed and adopted by this work falls into what Moore (1982 quoted in Goutam, 2015), an education theorist calls general or prescriptive theories. They are also known as practical theories; they make recommendations or specify what those involved in the practice of education ought to be doing. The theories prescribe actions and the prescriptions are of considerable size in scope, content and complexity. Proponents of these theories have recommended the type of persons and in some cases the society that should be produced

The particular theory discussed and applied in the discourse is that which was enunciated by John Dewey an American Philosopher and Psychologist. He propounded the theory of Education and Democracy which he called Instrumentalism and Pragmatism. The theory contains a set of prescriptions that were addressed to the handlers of the practice of education detailing education to serve an external end. In this case, the education being specified is that which has tangible substance as a component to offer so as to reflect the notion of an educated man. An essential feature of this theory is that it has predetermined purpose which it sets as target.

According to Dewey's pragmatism, learning should be student centered in order to produce persons who are responsible to the society. By so doing, education is society based and society enhancing. Another feature prescribed by the theory is that the child or student learner should actively participate in the learning process. Dewey therefore developed what he called experiential education, an education philosophy based on the idea that learning is acquired through experience and requires practice of the activities that directly relate to the learner's life. In experiential education, the student learns "by doing something then reflecting -on and learning-from the process". The learner thus "combines active learning with concrete experience and reflection. Examples of this type

of learning are service learning, adventure learning and workplace internship”.
<https://lep.utm.ed.>dewey>

Viable Education, Sustainable Democracy, peace and Unity: the nexus

There is direct relationship between viable education and sustainable democracy. Education provides the training for the individual to develop his personality and prepare him for the task in the society.

It is the position of this paper that persons who are to occupy leadership positions in governance must of imperative undertake approved courses of study in democratic and related studies for the required knowledge and right disposition to the responsibilities attached to the positions they aspire to occupy in future. More often, there tends to be the belief that leaders know the right things to do as demanded by their offices whereas they are densely deficient of the understanding and knowledge to discharge the duties and responsibilities of the offices. We can no longer assume that they know what to do, they should be taught what to do. The specially designed courses should be at the different levels of education from the primary, secondary to tertiary. It is expected that the courses will offer them the benefits of acquired knowledge of democracy, leadership principles and good governance that they are to uphold and defend when in service. This type of education combines “academic with skills needed for adulthood, such as how to work with others, openness to new ideas-skills that will not only help individuals succeed but also make society better as a whole “ (Tatter,2019)

Similarly the other citizens, particularly the masses, need education to remove the majority from illiteracy so they can know their rights, participate actively in elections and in the running of government. Where illiteracy holds sway, people are denied their rights, and have low participation in governance. Many of such people fall preys as thugs and hirelings in the hands of the politicians that use them for their mischief during elections. Government at the grass root or local government level is to serve as the training ground for new entrants into politics and governance.

Education also, is to determine the type of society for which it prepares the individual. In essence, education will determine the democracy, its tenets and principles. It will act as the integrative force at the various levels of government, between groups and individuals. It will help the people to acknowledge and appreciate the weaknesses and strength of one another, create love as against hate for genuine sense of oneness against the present primordial forces. It is education that will help to discard suspicion, mistrust and misrepresentation of one another and engender forces of unity. This fits perfectly into the philosophy and goals of the Nigerian Policy on Education which in part states inter alia;

“ –to live in unity and harmony as one indivisible, indissoluble, democratic and sovereign nation founded on the principles of freedom, equality and justice----for the philosophy to be in harmony with Nigeria’s national goals, education has to be geared towards self realization, better human relationship, individual and national efficiency,

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effective citizenship, national consciousness, national unity as well as towards social, cultural, economic, political, scientific and technological progress” (FGN, 2004)

Democracy, if well operated with due observance of its elements, in turn produces good governance and all the good things it offers the people and the society, including improved living standard, joy and peace. It is fair and offers impartial legal system; it is transparent and open; accountable to the people, responsive through well developed institutions that render quick services to the people; ensures wide consultations with the people and various interest groups to build consensus on matters: have a knack for equity and inclusiveness to give opportunity to various stakeholders to maintain, enhance and generally improve their welfare; ensure effectiveness and efficiency in carrying out official functions and rendering services to the people.

Democracy with these features is sustainable. It satisfies the conditions for peace and unity. At the levels of the individuals and groups, the government is acceptable and adjudged a performing one. Dissenting voices are few and not sufficient for serious concern. The drivers of the system by their training are knowledgeable about the needs of the society as well as their role and obligations.

Conclusion

This work has discussed the relevance of viable education to creating and growing a democratic culture in Nigeria. The goal envisaged is to have a democratic system that is sustainable. The position of the paper is that the goal is achievable through prescriptive practical education which assesses the society and determines the education, thus knowing the educated man. Truly democratic system produces good governance that meets the yearnings and aspirations of the people, engenders peace and unity. The paper argues that the various forms of conflicts bedeviling the country have occurred as reactions to poor governance system. The situation the paper opines will change with good governance bringing salutary effect.

Recommendations

- 1) Government should work out appropriate measures to reflect this thinking in the National Policy on Education and curricula at the various levels of the educational system
- 2) Federal government should take the initiative and work in collaboration with the other federating units since education is in the concurrent list of the constitution to carry out (1) above
- 3) The curricula should be enriched with relevant subjects e.g., Civic education should be taught as compulsory course in the primary and secondary schools. In addition government as a subject should be compulsory in the secondary schools
- 4) Further, a course on democracy should be introduced as a GST course in the Universities and like all other GST courses be made compulsory for all undergraduate students

- 5) Any person aspiring to contest election into a political position in the country should show evidence of having at least a credit pass or its equivalent in the courses at the Primary School Leaving Certificate Examinations and West African School Certificate (WASC) or its equivalent
- 6) Stake holders should operate true democratic governance by strict observance of the tenets of democracy
- 7) Holders of political positions should operate within the confines of the rules of the game and rid the system of all dictatorial tendencies
- 8) Access to education should be widened to gradually eliminate illiteracy among the citizens so as to be able to effectively participate in the electoral process and governance.

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