

IMPACT OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN NATIONAL INTEGRATION AND COHESION IN NIGERIA

Dr. Freeman Offor Enem

Abstract

This paper critically examined the impact of primary education in achieving national integration and cohesion in Nigeria. It X-rayed the importance of primary education within the context of its objectives as enshrined in the country's National Policy on Education (1998). The article posited that primary education, which provided basic education for Nigeria youths was very important in national integration and cohesion- The education provided effective means for appropriate orientation and socialization of the country's youths for citizenship. It inculcated into the receivers appropriate skills, knowledge, values and attitudes indispensable in the country's coexistence and active participation in the political and socio-economic of inculcating into the learner the development of spirit of national consciousness and patriotism. The development and acquisition of these qualities among Nigeria youths is very essential for the integration of the various components that made up this country, Nigeria.

Introduction

The Nigerian federation has never been so badly traumatized by ethnic conflicts and religious battles as it is now since the creation of Nigeria in 1914 by Sir Fredrick Lugard (Enem, 1999). The fledgling bond of unity among the ethnic groups has been severely weakened by divisive policies of successive military regimes and unenlightened politicians. There is more ethnic loyalty and tribal differences today than was at independence. Social peace is daily threatened by accusations and counter-accusations of discrimination, marginalization and exclusion. To compound the situation Nigerians who had over the years lived together in religious harmony recently began to fight each other on matters of worshipping and religion. From Modakeke-Ife crisis in South West, to the Ijaw-Itsekiri conflict in South-South to the religious cum ethnic riots in Kaduna, Kano and Jos. And now to the inter-ethnic crisis in Jos the Tiv-Jukun conflict in Benue State. It is un-abating gory tales of endless loss of human lives and material possessions all the way.

These developments were similar to the unhealthy political rivalry among the three major ethnic groups, which at last ended in 30 months civil war-1967-1970. Since, 1970 Nigerian government has made genuine efforts towards integrating the various ethnic groups into one true nation state to enable them strive towards national unity and development. In most cases, government identified education as a potent instrument for achieving national integration and cohesion. The need to eradicate illiteracy and its associated problems, provides basic education for the citizens and development, resulted in the introduction of Universal Primary education (UPE), nationwide in September 1976 (Enem,

1999). With reference to the anticipated gains of XJPE, with respect to national greatness, Fadeiye (1978:14) opined that no nation could rise above the mentality of its citizens and the quality of a nation depended on the quality of her citizens as well as liberating them from dismal chains of illiteracy. Ukwu (1985) described education as a social good in itself. He stressed that education is an element in the quality of life of an individual, his family and community. Formal education has become a screening instrument for entrance into various prescribed roles in modern society. The need to provide basic education to the people, especially the young ones has resulted to geometrical increase in number of both

public and private primary schools in the country in recent years.

Primary education according to National Policy on Education (NPE, 1998) is the education given in institutions for children aged 6 to 11 plus. It is the bedrock of the whole educational system in Nigeria since the rest of the education system is built upon it. Its success or failure determines the position of the entire educational system.

NPE (1998) further states the general objective of primary education as follows:

- 1) Inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy and ability to communicate effectively.
- 2) Lay a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking.
- 3) Give citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society.
- 4) Mould the character and develop sound attitude and morals in the child.
- 5) Give the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable him to function effectively in the society within the limits of his capacity.
- 6) Provide the child with basic tools for further educational advancement including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality.

These objectives form the basis for the provision of primary education throughout the states of the federation. The aim is for all-round development of the child -physical, emotionally, morally, technically and intellectually. It would help to erase ignorance and illiteracy, which rear their ugly heads among the general masses of this country. There is no doubt that the uneducated person is somebody with an under nourished mind and an under nourished mind is a problem for national integration and cohesion.

National integration is the process of developing a psychology of nationhood from internal heterogeneous elements. According to Obetta (1996), it describes the processes by which a series of frequently heterogeneous groups become cemented into a nation, integration is ability of different groups in a society to live together in productive and co-operative harmony and to accommodate differences within the framework of common interest to the benefit of all. Cultural integration involves the removal of prejudice as well as civil discrimination among the Nigerian social groups.

Education for national integration is very essential in Nigeria to promote peace and harmony, to reduce conflict, to lay good foundations for economic development of Nigeria and to make Nigerians work together for the greatness and survival of this nation.

Problems of National Integration In Nigeria

The efforts towards national integration in Nigeria had been hindered by a lot of barriers. Among these barriers are cultural plurality of the country. Nigeria is a culturally variegated country. There are numerous languages belonging to tribes with divergent historical backgrounds. Therefore, the tendency is for the people to feel differently even though the idea of belonging to the same nation is much cherished. Some members of the major ethnic groups have developed ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism poses a problem in an attempt to build up a united Nigeria. The existence of multi-languages in Nigeria reduces the opportunity for inter-ethnic communication among the diverse ethnic groups (Obetta, 1996).

Intense regional and ethnic rivalries, which existed since pre-independence times, are hampering national integration in Nigeria. Statism and

ethnicity promote unity and loyalty among the groups and consequently stiffen the spirit of national integration. Agbese (1985) noted that Nigerians invariably saw themselves primarily as northerners or easterners or westerners, thus, their loyalty to Nigeria was secondary. This condition did not pave way to national integration and co-existence.

The attitude of our political and military leaders towards national unity and cohesion is another hindrance to national integration and some of these leaders pursued policies which were carefully designed to favour their own ethnic groups at the expense of others. In this way they encouraged disunity and national disintegration.

Influence of Primary Education in National Integration

Primary education is essential for national integration and cohesion in that it helps to train a child to learn how to read and write so that a child can remain literate for the rest of his life, also to be able to read and write in his own mother tongue as well as other languages that National Policy on Education approves. The acquisition of the knowledge of both spoken and written English is essential for proper functioning of an individual in modern Nigerian society. In urban areas, for example, effective social interaction and business transactions depend largely on adequate knowledge of English language as a lingua franca for all citizens. Thus, the knowledge of the language acquired by citizens through primary education promotes mutual understanding, co-operation and national integration and cohesion. The teaching and learning of common language in multi-ethnic state like Nigeria are effective strategy for promoting national cohesion. Common language promotes inter-ethnic communication among the diverse ethnic groups (Enem, 1999).

Primary education is designed to give character and moral training to a child and the development of sound attitudes in pupils. Ndagi (1985) noted that education without morality is useless. Children must learn to respect other people. Primary education by inculcating in the pupils the right type of social moral values and attitudes has helped to develop appropriate didactic moral instruction strategies essential for the future progress of this country primary education is geared towards the eradication of the spirit of egocentrism in any child from his or her youths. This should be the responsibility of parents, teachers and guardians who should ensure that young children get this early direction towards consideration for others by correcting their actions, which appear selfish or egocentric. This education helps the child to move from egocentric to altruistic behaviour (ie behaviour which allows consideration for other's welfare) the greater is the tendency to give moral reasons for their behaviour when they grow older. Under this condition, primary education enhances the co-existence of the different ethno-religious groups in Nigeria.

Primary education provides the basis for appropriate moral orientation of the pupils, which is essential for ethical function and social stability. The Nigerian society is desperately menaced by all sorts of indiscipline and social vices (corruption, violence, religious bigotry, fanaticism, insincerity, prostitution, murder, sex and child abuse etc) that they are fast becoming accepted as normal way of life. Hence, one often hears such slang as "the Nigerian way" or "we are in Nigeria". Education, particularly at the primary level is essential for inculcating desirable values and attitudes in children for a better tomorrow. Ukeje (1979) succinctly observed that schools are generally called upon to aid in the development and perpetuation of the acceptable national attitudes, habits and ideas considered essential for national integration and cohesion.

Development of a basis for scientific and reflective thinking is another

objective of primary education. A child must be trained to know a systematic and logical manner for making conclusions or inferences between two or more things that result to particular affair or state of things. Sufficient exposure of primary school pupils to these experiences and knowledge will enhance their preparation for social responsibilities. In this way, their social behaviours and attitudes may be improved, with them appreciating the importance of unity and peaceful co-existence among the diverse groups in this country. Thus, pupils in the long run may shun those things, which dehumanize Nigerians and tarnish the image of the country. Inculcation of reflective thinking is very much essential for the development of co-operative and tolerant attitude, a sine qua non for national integration and cohesion in Nigeria.

Primary education emphasizes physical and health education, a subject very important for the total development of a child through some physical activities such as sports and games. Sports at this level of our educational system promotes the principles of healthy rivalry among member schools, inspires courage and love of noble adventure, lessons of justice and fair play, spirit of team work and selflessness. Furthermore Njoku (2000) maintains that primary

school sports festival which is organized annually promotes the much-needed social integration among the pupils and staff from different social and ethnic backgrounds. Also the pupils, in camp, help to foster group interest among competitors and the spirit of tolerance and sympathy for opposing competing teams is promoted.

Udoh (1988) noted that sports involve meeting people's basic needs or represent the channeling of instincts and as a result contribute to healthy emotional development. Training for emotional stability is very essential for national integration and co-existence of the diverse ethno-religious groups in Nigeria.

Primary education also emphasizes, to a large extent, agriculture as the basis for achieving national self-reliance especially in the area of food production and raw materials. This emphasis on agriculture is with the realities of national development. It is to debunk the wrongly held notion that school leavers should better seek for white-collar jobs instead of engaging in agriculture and making of local crafts. Anukam (1992) noted that development efforts would have positive effect only if the earlier prominent position given to agriculture as the backbone of our economy was restored. He argued that this determined the directing of the thinking of the citizens to recognize these things that really matter in people's national life, one of which is the ability of the nation to feed its growing population.

According to Anukam (1992) a better and more meaningful result will be achieved if we start early in primary educational system to cultivate the right attitude towards agriculture in our pupils. Thus, primary education is significant in national integration and cohesion especially with regard to directing the citizens effects towards the realities of national survival and individual economic opportunities.

Conclusion

Primary education as a factor for national integration and cohesion is geared towards common ties that promote unity in diversity. It inspires pupils towards developing a desire for positive achievement and self-improvement both at school and in later life. It provides basic education for appropriate orientation and socialization of the pupils in the heterogeneous society of Nigeria. By stressing the development of communicative ability of primary school, laying emphasis on agricultural development, stressing character and moral training as

well as development of analytical and reflective thinking among the primary school leavers, primary education is essential for mass psychological re-orientation and re-socialization of the youths. In this way, it provides a basis for the development of appropriate knowledge, skills, values and attitude, essential for national co-existence and unity in Nigeria.

Recommendations

For the realization of the above roles which primary education should pay in national integration and cohesion, the following recommendations should be strictly adhered to:

- 1) All stakeholders in the field of education should religiously fund the primary education scheme.
- 2) Qualified teachers should be recruited to teach in primary schools.
- 3) Visionary, altruistic, progressive, immaculate and God-fearing teachers who can rise beyond ethnic, sectional and religious sentiments to take the youths out of the state of violence and tension to a state of unity, peace and prosperity should be recruited to teach in primary schools.
- 4) The teacher's conditions of service should be improved and the promotion of hardworking teacher to highest rank or grades be made.
- 5) There is need for the revision of the current primary school curriculum to include contemporary socio-cultural issues in Nigeria development and survival.
- 6) Proper accountability and supervision of the fund provided for primary education should be made by the government to ensure proper utilization.
- 7) Supervisory and management units in primary education be improved and enlarged to match with the increasing number of schools and its intakes in order to achieve the primary education objectives.
- 8) Religious moral education should be emphasized and directed towards the promotion of religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence.

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