

TOWARDS TRANSFORMATION OF CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION TO ENHANCE NATIONAL INTEGRATION

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Abstract

Most countries of the world are heterogeneous in almost every aspect of their existence including Nigeria. However, the ability of individual states to harmonize their divergence has become their strength while those that have not integrated themselves effectively have not attained the potentials of nationhood. To achieve this daunting task the researcher emphasized on the importance of citizenship education to the members or citizens of the state in order to integrate for our advantage the differences in culture, religion, belief, economy etc. The paper posited that despite the compulsory teaching of citizenship education in Nigerian schools-primary, secondary and tertiary institutions Nigeria is still divided along ethnic, religious and political lines which seems to make national integration elusive. The paper held that the teaching of citizenship education alone is not enough to achieve national integration. This study recommended that for Nigeria to achieve national integration our leaders must change their attitudes towards the followers that will engender mutual respect, trust, accountability and discipline between the leaders and the people they lead no matter who they are or where they come from. This will go a long way to give all and sundry a sense of belonging as we practice what we teach.

Key words: Citizenship Education, National Integration.

States all over the world attached so much importance to their citizens. This is because it is believed that without the citizens the state does not exist. As a result of this the state does a lot to maintain her relationship with her citizen world over.

The maintenance of this relationship goes beyond the mere provision of security and infrastructure. The infrastructure the state provides for her citizens can only be well utilized and managed when they appreciate the government's efforts. There is an urgent need to educate the entire citizenry, especially children and the youth whom we say are the leaders of tomorrow about the society or the state where they live. Most of our youths are not aware of their responsibilities to the state but only depend on the state to

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provide virtually all their needs without giving a support to the state. This is where the need for citizenship education comes into in every state.

Nigeria as a state since her independence in 1960 has been faced with persistent problems and ethnocentrism in its body politics. This trend has had significance negative impact on the effort towards national integration. This has made nonsense of the abundant human, material and natural resources of the country because as long as we have not really accepted and see ourselves as one people in one united country the goals of national integration will remain a mirage. Nigeria is a heterogeneous state that is divergent in many ways-religion, culture, belief etc. This heterogeneity was not considered as an important factor by the British colonialists who amalgamated the different people to become one “indivisible” state called Nigeria.

Despite the false believe that Nigeria is an “indivisible” state our differences seems to be our weakness .Our past leaders were not able to galvanize the different ethnic groups and interests to achieved a national goal. Lack of effective leadership has dwindled the spirit of patriotism, nationalism, integrity, honesty, discipline etc, and has encouraged severe competition among the ethnic groups in all aspect.

This work believes that despite these differences and its attendant effects, Nigeria can through effective teachings and practice of citizenship education realize her goal on national *integration*.

Conceptualization Citizenship Education

The states exist due to the presence or existence of the citizens. As a result of this some states excel more than others because of the quality and quantity of her citizens. Therefore the importance of citizens to the state cannot be overemphasized. It is as a result of this that states institute a form of education to her citizens that will enable members of a society acquire full knowledge, not only of the state, but also of their duties and obligations to the states, their rights and expectations from the states, the necessity of total conformity with acceptable ways and standards of life on the need for full compliance with rules, regulations and total allegiance to the state. Citizenship education is the education of an individual concerning himself and his state that will not only socialize but emancipate and transform him for functional roles in a dynamic society (Anumba, 2013).

According to Okereke and Oti (2005) the course creates the appropriate awareness which citizenship ought to have of their status and this helps to make them

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patriotic citizens. It is against this backdrop that the National Policy on Education noted that widespread ignorance among Nigerian groups about each other and about themselves will be remedied by instituting a compulsory first year course in the social organization, customs, culture and history of our people. The policy went further to state that award of degrees will be made conditional upon passing of the paper in this course. Citizenship education is squarely at the centre of what this policy aims at.

The course covers the National Policy on Education aims and objectives which states as follows as contained in National Policy on Education (2013:1-2).

- ❖ Development of the individual into a morally sound patriotic and effective citizens;
- ❖ Total integration of the individual into the immediate community, the Nigerian society and the world;
- ❖ Provision of equal access to qualitative educational opportunities for all citizens at all levels of education, within and outside the formal school system;
- ❖ Inculcation of national consciousness, values and national unity; and
- ❖ Development of appropriate skills, mental, physical and social abilities and competencies to empower the individual to live and contribute positively to the society.

The above objectives lay so much expectation on the importance of citizenship education to the state. Hence, Aguwa (2005) was of the opinion that citizenship education is a type of education that the state gives to her citizens as a legal member of a state to make them effective citizens who are useful to themselves and to their environment. Without the citizen been useful to himself he cannot equally be important to her state. The state goes extra miles to inculcate national ethics to her citizens through the teaching of citizenship education.

For Okereke (2005) citizenship education is the organization of instructions, programmes, sensitization, and training for young citizen in a formal setting cultivating in them desirable habits, values, behavioural patterns, spirit of nationalization and patriotism that instills changes in the citizens towards productive rewards to the state.

National Integration

Nigeria is a heterogeneous state made up of cultural, religious and linguistically divergent groups, sometimes estimated to number about 250 ethnic groups Okereke, (2005). These are people who were independent of one another before the force full amalgamation of 1914. Even before independence in 1960, Nigerians has not actually seen themselves as one people. However, most heterogeneous countries have one way or the other minimized their differences through national integration.

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National integration is a way to make people aware about the power of unity among different people in a country. National integration is a process of bringing unity among people of different religions, tribes, culture to create a single identity of Nigeria. It is a process of combining group of all the people living of the nation to make a single identity. National integration is a particular sentiment which binds people together into one common bond as a nation without noticing the religion, caste, background or language (Indiacele brating.com. n. d).

Nwosu (2005) was of the opinion that integration has to do with the elimination of ethnic sentiments and parochialism among the ethnic groups that constitute a political system. No wonder therefore an integrated society could be seen as one in which political conflicts have been eliminated. There is a high level of mistrust and disintegration among Nigerians. This has led to ethnic and communal crises including the civil war between 1967-1970.

Nigeria as a country of different people has not been able to maximize the potentials inherent in diversity among the different people and culture. This has reflected negatively on the overall performance of Nigeria as a state because we pay much loyalty to our ethnic origin than Nigerian state. The above situation as found in Nigeria is against the opinion of Shone (2012) who was of the opinion that national integration is of the awareness of common identity amongst the citizens of a country ,it means that though we belong to different tribes, religions, culture and speak different languages we recognize the fact that we are one. This kind of integration is very important in the building of a strong and prosperous nation for us all.

Impact of Citizenship Education on National Integration

Every nation has objectives towards its nation building and therefore need capable role players to build a strong and reliable nation .In other to maximize the potentials of citizens in a state, the state has to give her citizens relevant education. It is against this background that Spencer Churchill (1874-1965) noted that “whenever a nation is in need of change, education is the key to unlock the knotty challenges”.

In Nigeria we experiment with disintegration, the very integrity of our nation is threatened, patriotism is at its lowest ebb and cynicism is wild spread waxing stronger with time. This has lead to the emergence of different groups like –OPC, Boko Haram, MASSOB, MEND, IPOB, etc working for the disintegration of the country (Prince, 2013). Thus Nigeria must wake up to her duty of educating her citizens on the need for peaceful co-existence and unity in diversity. Citizenship education is a developed set of

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information which students learn in order to be the kind of citizens they ought to be in their country.

Every country packages their educational system to suit their peculiarities. Nnoli was of the opinion that the citizens of Nigeria, right from the colonial days to the early years of independence were exposed to high degrees of sectionalism which informed the piece of information they have about the country. There is no love among Nigerians today. Patriotism and nationalism is almost dead and most Nigerians see people from other tribes as their enemies in politics, religion, economy etc. Youths who are called the leaders of tomorrow in social media platforms pour vituperation on one another.

Cursing and calling all sorts of names while commenting with ethnic parochial ideology at the detriment of national interest. These and other vices have for decades ravaged our nation due to poor or complete ignorance of citizenship education. The teaching of citizenship education helps the citizens not only to understand their own groups but more importantly, to understand the whole network relationship with others within and beyond. Citizenship education is highly articulated endeavour put in place to deliver both adequate and highly valuable information to the citizens to guarantee their optimal citizenship.

Consequently, it exposes the citizens to their rights, privileges, duties and obligations as a citizen of Nigeria. Knowledge of rights and privilege enables the citizens to defend themselves intelligently while that of duties ensures that the laws of the land are not ignorantly flouted by them. The course creates appropriate awareness which citizens ought to have of their status and this helps to make them patriotic citizens. It helps to reduce the degree of restiveness among citizens.

Most countries of the world like Britain and India have well established mechanisms put in place for teaching citizenship vis-à-vis a feedback on its impact on the citizens and the states in general. In Nigeria, despite the importance of citizenship education on national integration we have not seen much of this as Nigerians are still divided on ethnic lines. This could be attributed to poor educational policies. In the editorial of Sunday, August 26, 2012, the Guardian Newspaper commented on the dismal result of May/June West Africa School Certificate Examination. It observed with sadness the fact that only 38.8% of those that sat for the examination passed. The paper emphatically recommended an education revolution, and many people agreed because even today our stories have not changed for better either. You cannot give what you don't have. Only truly educated people can become different drivers and different deliverers. To achieve national integration through citizenship education a paradigm

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shift is needed in the nation's educational system. The literacy rate list issued by UNDP in 2015 put Nigeria's literacy at 59.6%. Male literacy at 69.2%, 49.7 % female literacy and 19.5% gender difference. Nigeria also has 42 million illiterates compared to 27 million Ethiopia, 15 million Egypt, and Congo DR 12 million (UNDP Report, 2015)

Despite the above bleak data there is still a way out. It is unequivocally clear that Nigeria is in desperate need of unity in its continuous march to nationhood. We need a new orientation in leadership that will refocus our concentration on national rebirth and unity of Nigeria .The indivisibility of Nigeria must be the responsibility of all Nigerians in talks and indeed. Our leaders most often create a wide gap between the government and the governed.

We live in a country where our leaders talk more and do less, where our leader's speeches are at variance from what they do. A nation with hypocrites and deceit at all levels.

The recent exposure by president Buhari on the fight against corruption on those who embezzled public fund and trust while in office even when the lives of Nigerians are at stake is unbelievable and disheartening. This is at variance with what we teach in citizenship education .Public servants, security men, elected members stole billions at the detriment of poor Nigerians who are denied employment either because of where they came from or because they could not pay certain amount of money to "buy" the job. Those working are owed salaries for six to eight months. Our youths are easily carried away by sudden and excessive wealth displayed by our leaders at all levels. What they see, hear and read about our leaders encourage them to anticipate even to steal more if they have the opportunity.

Conclusions

Citizenship education is the backbone of any country because through the teaching of citizenship education the state is able to orient and reorient the behaviour of her citizens on the ethics of the country which includes honesty, integrity, hard work, accountability, discipline, effective leadership and followership, patriotism, nationalism and other ethical or ideological concepts that is a priority to the state. In Nigeria, the teaching of citizenship education in our schools seems to have little effect on integrating the divergent and heterogeneous groups in Nigeria.

Though our education system is not yet where it supposes to be, it has contributed so much on national integration through the teaching of citizenship education in our institutions of learning nationwide.

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However, the teaching of citizenship education seems not to be enough to achieve national integration there is need for attitudinal change by our leaders to compliment the teachings of citizenship education in other to achieve national integration for us all.

Recommendations

The teaching of citizenship no doubt will go a long way to enhance national integration only when our leaders change their attitude towards their followers.

This is when we will experience mutual respect, trust, accountability and discipline between the leaders and the lead no matter who they are or where they come from.

It is penitent that our leaders has for many years indulged in deceit of the electorates. They do not keep their electoral promises and instead of being prudent in accountability and management of our common wealth are seen holding public offices as a means of personal enrichment through corrupt practices. This is at variance with what we teach.

Public lectures, seminars and cultural heritage programmes should be put in place to indoctrinate Nigerians who do not have the opportunity to attend schools.

The UNDP Report 2015 puts Nigerian's illiterate figure at 42 million. This is high and unacceptable and there is the need for this population to be education to reduce the challenges facing Nigeria.

Despite the shortcomings in the education sector of Nigeria, this paper is of the opinion that the teaching of citizenship education is one of the major processes to attain national integration. There is the need for government to show more commitment on the teachings of citizenship education to orient and re-orient Nigerians on the importance of national integration.

Granted but not conceding that citizenship education has been made a general course in our tertiary institutions, that is only a step towards realizing the objective. There is the dire need to teach, sensitize, socialize, and to continue teaching, sensitizing and socializing the learner till we achieve the objective of national integration.

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Our leaders should see themselves as symbols of integration rather than disintegration through their actions, speeches or ethnic inclination.

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