



Citizenship Education as a Panacea for National Cohesion in Nigeria

John Amaoge Wordu

Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

johnwordu117@gmail.com

Abstract

The paper focused on citizen education as the panacea for national cohesion in Nigeria. The Nigerian nation is a conglomeration of many ethnic groups fused together by the British imperialist for the purpose of economic gains and political subjugation. Despite the unification, the various ethnic groups still maintained their ethnic hegemony at the expense of national cohesion. Government in the past has made concerted efforts for national cohesion but all to no avail. The paper revealed that citizens' education does not only instill on the citizens the ability to take decisions without the recourse to ethnic or religious bigotry but sensitizes the citizens of their rights, duties and the desire for national consciousness against sectional interest. The paper concluded that inculcating of positive values, attitudes and knowledge that will encourage national consciousness and harmonious relationship among the various ethnic groups is the panacea to national cohesion. The paper suggests that introduction of citizens' education in every facet of educational programs and adequate funding of education will foster national cohesion.

Keywords: Citizenships, Citizenship Education, National Unity and National Cohesion

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

Wordu, J. W. (2020). Citizenship education as a panacea for national cohesion in Nigeria. *International Journal of Scientific Research in Education*, 13(4), 720-729.

Copyright © 2020 IJSRE

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a conglomeration of over there hundred and sixty ethnic groups imbedded together by the British imperialist for the purpose of economic gains and political subjugation. Despite the amalgamation of these different ethnic groups in 1914, the various groups still maintain their territorial patriotism at the expense of nationalism. The major ethnic groups still maintained their political hegemony at the detriment of the minority groups. The minority fear of domination by the majority has led to agitation for state creation and other ways to alley their fears. In fact it was this fear of the minority that led to the establishment of the Willink Commission in 1957 that led to the creation of Mid-Western Region. It is also to allay the fears of the minority that led to the entrenchment of the fundamental human rights into the constitution.

Despite the creation of the region and subsequent creation of states with the establishment of the human rights into the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria the

minority ethnic groups' fear still persists. In some cases the agitation by the minority has led to pockets of riots and in some cases a full fledged crisis. This power game between the major groups and minority groups has caused political instability in the country which has weakened the unity of the country.

Nigeria became an unsafe geographical location induced by various incessant inter religious crises, inter and intra ethnics violence in the country. The menace caused by kidnapping, bandits, arm rubbing and total breakdown of law and order by the activities of Boko Haram in the North East, the activities of the militant group in Niger Delta and the issue of resources control, and continuous agitation of the Republic of Biafra in the South East has treated the desire of Nigeria to be a united, strong and self-reliant nation.

Despite the three years of civil war fought in order to maintain Nigeria as indivisible nation, it appears that Nigerian had not learnt enough, but still living with distrust and mutual suspicions among the ethnic groups. Nigerians are no longer patriotic but lacked sense of national consciousness and are interested in protecting their sectional integrity at the expense of the nation. It is against this backdrop that this paper tend to explore the use of citizens education as a panacea for national cohesion in Nigeria.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Citizenship Education

The Oxford learner's dictionary define citizen as a person who has legal rights to belong to a particular country. Citizens are members of a given state or nation. Citizenship is the process of being a legal member of a state conferred with rights, privileges and duties. Citizenship is a mutual relationship between the state and the citizens. The state provide and protect the alienable rights of the citizens while the citizens in responses perform certain duties and obligations to the state. There are various ways to acquiring citizenship in Nigeria namely by birth, registration and marriage, naturalization, adaptation and by founding etc.

Education is conscious efforts of impacting to the learners certain skills, knowledge and positive values that will enable the individuals to subdue the environment and contribute to the development of the society. Ihueme and Ebirim (2016), asserts that education is a total aggregate of all the procedures by which an individual develop abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive values to the society. Education is a lifelong learning process that starts when a child is born to when the persons dies. It helps the individual to acquire certain skills and knowledge that enable harmonious relationship between the individual and the state. In the same vein, Ihueme and Ebirim (2016) opined that education is an attempt to transmit to the people culture, experience and knowledge developed and preserved over time for the enlightenment and strengthening the citizenry.

Citizenship education is a form of education given to the citizens in order to enlighten the citizens about their inalienable rights and responsibilities. It instills on the citizens the right virtues that make the individuals to take inform decisions and be responsible citizens. Ikedanya, (1998), opined that citizenship education is a conscious process of inculcating certain values, habits, skills and attitudes which society considered desirable and essentials for the survivals as a unit and for its development. Consequently, the essences of citizenship education are to help the citizens to participate actively in the society and make informed decisions to the development of the society. In collaborating this, Umudjere, Okogu and Osah, (2016) defined citizenship

education as a process of preparing Nigeria citizens for better internationalization of true democracy for them to be legally minded and socially incline in practicing and exercising their rights and duties without fear or ignorance.

Objectives of Citizens Education in Nigeria

- To transmit cultural and patriotic values that will engender individual and society development,
- To inculcate national consciousness and understanding of socio-political problem in Nigeria,
- Help the citizens understand the dynamism of national economy and the need to participate in the development of the economy,
- Help the citizens to understand the benefits of patriotism and nationalism to the nation,
- Help the citizens to appreciate their rights, duties and obligation to the nation,
- To avail the citizens the opportunities to understand the need for national cohesion despite the differences in tribal and culture,
- To encourage the citizens to build and participate in democratic values where rule of law and justice shall prevail, and
- To inculcate to the citizens to eschew all forms of vices that are inimical to the development of the state. Examples are political thugs, examination mal-practice, bandits, kidnapping etc.

National Cohesion

National as defined by Collins English dictionary means related to the whole of a country or nation rather than a part of it, while cohesion is what holds the components units together. Enem (2002) defined cohesion as a conscious desire for diverse groups of people to belong together and affirms the condition of mutual dependence. National cohesion is when the citizens of a given country desire to live together, has a sense of belonging, oneness and the willingness to pull their resources for the common good of people irrespective of the differences in tongue and culture. National cohesion strives where there is peace, justice and rule of law. Enem (2002), opined that national cohesion is a process and an outcome of instilling and enabling all citizens in the country to have a sense as well as feeling that they are members of the same country, engaged in a common enterprise and facing a shared challenges.

At this junction it becomes necessary to allude that national cohesion, national unity and national integration shall be used interchangeable. Therefore for clarity it behooves on the writer to define the various concepts. For the purpose of clarification national unity depicts a pluralist society consisting of people from different cultural background, linguistics, regions and ethnic group who decided to forge ahead to form one indivisible state. The hall mark of national unity is the desire of the people to put outside their political, social and religious difference and decided to be together. It is the same vain that Eme-Uche (2012) opined that national unity portents a feeling of common purpose that blind people of diverse cultures, colour and ethnic nationalities together as one.

National integrations involves the process of instilling national consciousness, national identity, togetherness and loyalty among people of different historical background, religion, culture into a single political entity. It is the process of feeling togetherness irrespective of

diversity in culture, religion and ethnic background and they resolved to be under the same political entity. Edosa (2014) opined that national integration is related to the building of nation-states out of disparate socio-economic, religious, ethnic and geographical elements.

Therefore the essence of national cohesion is to encourage cohesiveness among the various diverse groups in the country. It is to ensure and promote equality of opportunities, good relationship, harmony and peaceful coexistence among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. To ensure that resources are equitably distributed in the country irrespective of the tribal, race, religion or the background. Put differently national cohesion is building a free and egalitarian society where no man can be oppressed based on the geographical location, colour or tribe but a land full of bright opportunities for all.

Efforts of Government towards National Cohesion

It is pertinent to mention that in the past government had made concerted efforts to ensure that Nigeria remain a free and egalitarian society where every Nigerians will considered himself or herself as a Nigerian first before identifying the region. The Nigeria civil war was fought in order for Nigeria to remain as one indivisible nation.

At the end of the Nigeria Civil War that lasted for three years the federal government in order to cement national cohesion declare no victor no vanquished and launched the programme of rehabilitation, reconciliation and reconstruction. Credence to this General Gowon reiterated the need to preserve the territorial integrity and unity of Nigeria. Unfortunately these were mere slogan that could not achieve the desired goals. The mere rhetoric could not be equated with losses of human and economic resources inflicted on the southern Nigeria because of the civil war at the end of military junta in Nigeria that ushered the second republic. Nigeria jettisoned the parliamentary administration and adopted the presidential system with Alahaji Shehu Shagari becoming the first executive president of Nigeria. In his inaugural address he opined that the slogan of one nation one destiny shall be transited into reality. But the reality on ground showed otherwise.

Another concerted effort of the federal government in the integration of the various ethnic groups in Nigeria is the entrenchment of the fundamental human rights in the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This was done in order to allay the fears of the minority ethnic groups. The preamble of the constitution affirmed that the people of Nigeria solemnly resolve to live in unity and harmony as one indivisible and in dissolvable sovereign nation. The constitution affirms that national integration shall be actively encouraged, whilst discrimination on the ground of place of origin, sex, religion, ethnic or linguistic association or ties shall be forbidden (FGN, 1999).

Also the constitution further entrenched certain provisions that will enhance national cohesion in the country. Examples are federal character and quota system. The establishment of federal charter and quota system are administrative mechanism by the federal government in order to ensure that every Nigerians are given a sense of belonging in the allocation of resources irrespective of ethnic or regional background. Federal character is used in federal appointments into federal civil service and ensuring that all the states are even represented. The constitution also encouraged that political parties must have national outlook and not regional based as witnessed in the first republic.

The federal government established unity schools as a platform where all Nigerians youths from various geo political zones will met and learn together and is the process develop a

harmonious relationship between the students. The unity schools were established among other objectives is to guarantee national cohesion, integration and nation building among Nigerian children. The unity schools were supposed to produce men and women with broad mindset who can actively participate in the act of governance without prejudice compelled by ethnic or religious background.

Another effort of government to ensure national cohesion and integration is the establishment of National Youths Service Corps in 1973 was aimed at encouraging common ties among the Nigerian youths and promote national unity and integration, encourage Nigeria youths to eschew religious intolerance by accommodating religious differences. At this junction it is important to note that the reason for the establishment of unity schools and National Youths Service Corps are still prevalent in today's polity but the general insecurity in the country will not allow parents to send their children outside their geo-political zone or areas outside their influence. The establishment of quality private schools has also not helped matters. Parents prefer to send their children to private schools where students' unrest and cult-related violence activities are at barest minimal. In the recent past the federal government inaugurated council of inter-religious council co-headed by Sultan of Sokoto, the supreme council for Islamic affairs and the national president of Christian Association of Nigeria on how to broker peaceful co-existence among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Unfortunately, it appears that all these measures had not yielded the desired result and those factors that aided the civil war are still much with us. It is so worrisome that Gowon, (1996) cited in Eme-Uche and Okonkwo (2020) ones declare that 'suffice to say that putting all consideration to test; political, economic as well as social, there is no basis for Nigeria unity, which has been rocked, not only once but several times'. This attests the level of disunity among the geographical entity called Nigeria. It is in the same vein that Edosa (2014), describe Nigeria as mere geographical expression. But more worrisome that after over five decades of political independence the unity of Nigeria is a subject of public discussion and all the anomalies that befell Nigeria in early post-independence are still prevalent till date.

It is against this background that Eme-Uche and Okonkwo (2020) asserted that structural, constitutional and initiatives cannot engender national unity without appreciable change in the value orientation and material condition of the citizenry. The intra and inter-ethnic killing still exist with the continuous killing of Christians in the southern Kaduna. The activities of Boko Haram in the North-East and the continuous campaign for the balkanization of Nigeria where in the Northern Nigeria will proclaim sovereignty and establish sharia state. The people of South East are still clamouring for a sovereign nation-Biafra and the activities of militants in the Niger Delta and the agitation of resource control are a pointer that Nigerian is a failing nation and the leaders must be pragmatic and adopt an inclusive education that will salvage Nigeria from this quagmire.

Nigeria needs education that will instill in the citizens the rights, skills, knowledge and positive values that ensure the rule of laws and peaceful co-existence among the various ethnic groups. The Nigerian youths need a value re-orientation through the citizenship education. In this regard that Omare (1999) opined that citizenship education trains the mind of people in the direction of what is required for a stable and enduring democracy. Citizenship education liberates the mind of the citizens and inculcates spirit of national consciousness on how to live together in a pluralistic state. It is in this regard that the researcher is of the view that in the prevailing circumstances the use of citizenship education is the solution for national cohesion in Nigeria

The Role of Citizenship Education in Building National Cohesion

Nigeria is at cross road considering the various intra and inter religious crisis in Nigeria that has dazed the very foundation of our unity. The Nigeria nation is more divided along ethnic line than ever in the history of this great country. Nigeria is in dare need of national cohesion and the best option is to inculcate in the citizens national consciousness and positive values that will help the citizens to make informed decisions on treading issues without ethic leverage. Ogidi and Ejim (2016) asserts that all forms of citizenship education is aimed at inculcating respect for others and recognition of the equality of all human beings; and combating all forms of discrimination by fostering a spirit of tolerance and peace among human being.

Citizenship education enable citizens acquire general knowledge and the respect for others and more importantly for public institutions. Citizenship education does not only enhance democratic values but deepens the democratic culture. It helps to encourage civility and tolerance in national discuss. Citizenship education helps in promoting peaceful coexistence in a country with multi ethnic groups with diverse culture.

Education is acknowledged as instrument for national development and also potent tools that if well manage can foster peace and unity in the state. The federal government acknowledged this in the goals of education as aptly captured in the National Policy on Education that; development of the individual into a morally sound patriotic and effective citizens; inculcation of national consciousness, value and national unity (FRN, 2014).

The persuasive nature of education cannot be underrated. During the colonial period the missionary used education to spread the gospel and used it to train clergymen and today there are churches almost in every major streets in Nigeria. Therefore, the Nigerian educators should evolve the educational system that will inculcate to the citizens the idea of national consciousness and respect for fundamental human's rights and rule of law; education that recognize equal dignity and respect for others; education that will produce citizens with moral qualities and instill in them the spirit of tolerance and peaceful co-existence. These virtues are the essence of citizenship education hence citizenship education should be introduced in all sphere of educational system.

Osakwu (1993), posits that citizenship education convey to the learners the body of knowledge, set of values and behavioural orientation that are considered vital and necessary for the sustenance and wellbeing of the people. According to Merieobi, Domike and Osakwu cited in Yusuf (2005), Sparta which was essentially a military and aristocratic city transformed Homer's chivalric type of education into a system that serve its military and political purpose. Considering the pluralistic nature of Nigeria political system with continuous mutual distrust among the political elites, with religious chauvinism and sectional patriotism at the impairment of the national patriotism. There is the urgent need to instill on the populace the kind of education that will foster national consciousness and national cohesion and citizenship education becomes the platform where the citizens are expose to essential political norms, democratic tenets and values of the society. Citizenship education if well-articulated into the educational system will reduce the issue of ethnocentrism among the political elites and imbed the virtue of unity in diversity.

It is in this regard that Emem (2007), opined that citizenship education will help the individual to develop democratic values such as obedience to law, freedom of opinions, liberty, justice, tolerance and respect for the constitute authority. Drawing inference from this, the essence of citizenship education is to produce a good citizens that can make inform decisions,

take responsibilities for his action, have a mutual respects among the different ethnic groups, ability to tolerate divergent views, place the nation first before regional interest, and develop positive values honesty, integrity, patriotism among others that will help to build a just and united country that is full of equal opportunities for all citizens.

Therefore, citizen's education do not only enhance democracy but also increase the level of awareness in the environment, political rights, duties and obligation. It is important to note that citizenship education instill spirit of patriotism, nationalism and commitment to social justice.

The Challenges Inhibiting National Cohesion in Nigeria

The Nigeria society is characterized with people with diversity of interests, needs, beliefs, attitudes, values and mutual suspicions among the various groups. While the major ethnic groups are struggling to perpetual their political hegemony, the minority groups continued agitation for political relevant has caused serials of crises in Nigerian political system. The Nigerian nation is besieged with arrays of socio- political problems kidnapping, religious crisis, loss of positive values, and lack of patriotism to primitive accumulation of wealth to massive corruption in the political system.

Another factor that are inhibiting the national cohesion in Nigeria is the number of out of school children and youths. UNESCO (2017), estimated that about 262 million children and youths are out of school. And Nigeria is ranked as having the highest number of out of school children in the world. It has risen from 10.5 million in 2015 to 13.2 million (Adedigba, 2018). The increase is as a result of the activities of Boko Haram in North East and the incessant killing in the in Kaduna Yobe and Zangaria and other crises that render many homeless.

Closely related to out of school children is the high rate of illiteracy in Nigeria. In 1999, the federal government lunched Universal Basic Education (UBE) in order to eradicate illiteracy, ignorance and poverty among others. But unfortunately, close to two decades after the inauguration of UBE the rate of illiteracy is still very high in Nigeria. Adedigba (2018), quoting Adumu who said that 60million or thirty percent of the population of Nigerians cannot read or write. It is dishearten that in 21stcentury, where knowledge and information drive the economy that many of Nigerians youth are out of school and illiterate. The social consequent will be increase in crime rate, poverty, and low self-esteem. These cream of illiterates and unemployed youths will graduate as miscreants and will be ready available instrument to cause mayhem in the society.

Another factors inhabiting national cohesion in Nigeria is structural deficit in educational system. It is discouraging that the school systems provides international studies to Nigerians at the detriment of national studies. Nigerians are interested in studying the political development of America than studying the various languages, ethnic groups, the various cultures and festivals, the life pattern and cultural heritage in Nigeria. The more we understand the various ethnic groups and the evolution of Nigeria state the better we appreciate the slogan that our strength lies in our diversity.

The continuous use of English language as the lingua franca in Nigeria and mostly in the educational system is eroding the national cohesion. The using of English language as medium of instruction especially in the primary and basic education is giving preeminence to English culture over indigenious culture. The use of mother tongue as language of instruction is very important in acquisition of skills and knowledge mostly at the primary level. According to

Azoulay (n,d) for UNESCO, every mother tongue deserves to be known, recognized and given greater prominence in sphere of public life. It is still in this regard that Fafunwa advocated the use of mother tongue as medium of instruction in school in Nigeria. Research evidence are bound that the use of mother tongue is the optimal language for literacy and learning throughout primary school. (UNESCO, 2008). Therefore for citizenship education to play the desired roles of molding a good citizens who can participate in a democratic governance, protect the public institutions and obey constituted authorities the language of instruction should be the children's first language.

The activities of Boko Haram in the North East is posing a big threat to the unity of Nigeria. Boko Haram is Militant Islamic Movement which literary means western education is forbidden. Their ideology is based on Sunni fundamentalist with intention to establish an Islamic State in Nigeria and expunge the influence of western education. On April 2014, about 276 Chibok students were allegedly kidnapped by Boko Heram militants. Also on February 2018, another female students from Government Technical College, Depchi in Yobe state were abducted. This unwholesome act has affected the psyches of the students and engulfed the students with fear and in the process many students has abounded their academic quests.

Furthermore the problem of indigene has also stalled national cohesion in Nigeria. Indigene is a word derived from indigenious which means *collective rights based on the indigene of the community*. Despite the inclusion of citizenship in the constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria. Nigerians still distinguish between the indigene and non- indigene in the provision of certain services and even in the payment of certain taxes and levies. The payment of certain levies by non-indigenes for developmental purposes even within states has increase the mutual distrust among the people hence erode national cohesion. This repulsive policy is more pronounced in an elective positions. For instance, no matter the length of residence in a given area, it is usually difficult, in fact impossible for an Igbo man to contest chairman's position in the northern part of Nigeria and vice versa. These behavior are a challenge in cementing a good mutual relationship between the various nationalities that Nigeria is made up.

CONCLUSION

Citizenship education is a brand of education that is concern with producing good citizens and engender national cohesion. The importance is predicated on the facts that it instill on the citizens the right values and attitudes that enhance national consciousness. Citizenship education does not only sensitize on the fundamental human rights, duties and obligations it also instill on the citizens the sense of patriotism- placing national interest above personal interest. Citizenship education equipped the citizens with tenets of democracy, rule of law and ensure that people make inform decisions on national discuss without leaning on ethnic leverage. Citizenship education prepare the citizens to live a responsible life devoid of ethnic jingoism, mutual distrust but inculcate in the citizens desirable values that will enable citizens live peacefully among the various component units. Also citizens who can tolerate and appreciate that tongue may differ but in unity we will build a country full of opportunities for every person irrespective of their background, social status, region or religion. Therefore the paper concludes that for a peaceful, united, and just society citizenship education must be inculcated into all levels of education.

Suggestions

In view of the challenges inhibiting national cohesion in Nigeria the following suggestions are proffered.

- The educational system should be structured in such a way that more emphasis should be placed on entrenching positive values that will instill in the citizens national consciousness and patriotism that will help in building a united Nigeria rather than producing doctors and engineers for self-fulfillment and personal aggrandizement.
- The federal government should convoke a national conference on indigenous languages with view to standardize more Nigerian languages and make it suitable for instruction in primary and basic education.
- The government should insist on the study of two indigenous languages in basic education class while one indigenous language in West Africa Secondary Senior Certificate Examination (WASSCE) and other equivalent examinations. A credit in any Nigeria language should be a waiver for students who failed English language. This will not only enhance national cohesion but will help to preserve Nigeria linguistic heritage.
- The educational administrators should initiate policy on national studies that will explain the various ethnic groups in Nigeria and her historical development. As a follow up government should not only ensure that citizenship education are thought in primary and secondary schools but must be a condition for admission into tertiary institutions. The school administrators should ensure that citizenship education is a general course in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. National cohesion can be fostered if the different ethnic groups in Nigeria learn to tolerate one another. People from other ethnic groups should be ready and willing to accommodate people from different culture and religion. The love for one nation should be above the other primordial interests and inter-ethnic marriages and organizing national cultural festivals by bring different people from different culture, religions and backgrounds will help to understand and appreciate other people way of life and create a bound of relation across ethnic boundaries. Government at all levels should provide adequate fund to education to help to remove the youths out of the streets and occupy them in meaning activities.

REFERENCES

- Adedigba, A (2018), Nigeria now has 13.2 million out of school children. www.premumtimesng.com.
- Azoulay, A. (n, d). UNESCO and the use of mother tongue in education. www.sunnewsonline.com.
- Edosa, E. (2014). National integration, citizenship, political participation and democratic stability in Nigeria. *An International Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 3(3).
- Eme-uche, U., & Okonkwo, C. (2020). Nigeria and the challenges of national unity. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication>.
- Enem, F. O. (2002). *Fundamental of social studies for schools and colleges*. Yemen Publishers.

- Ihueme, R, N., & Ebirim, P. U. (2016). Managing education in an underdeveloped economy. In Oluwuo, S D. & Asodike, J. D. *Managing Schools for productivity; emerging perspectives*. Port Harcourt: Pearl publishers.
- Ikediana, N. U. (1998). *National drill: A prerequisite for social and economic development*. New Nigeria.
- Omare, O. (1999). Enhancing democracy in Nigeria through citizenship education. *Nigerian Journal of Social Studies Review*, 8(1).
- Osakwu, E. O. (1993). Citizenship education; the habit of social studies. *Nigeria Journal of Social Studies Review* 2(1).
- Umudjere, S. O., Okogo, J., & Osah, M. (2016). Citizenship education in Nigeria schools; Social Studies Approach. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, 4(2).
- UNESCO, (2017). Out of school children and youths. Retrieved from www.uis.unesco.org.
- Yusuf, A. (2005). Citizenship education; an instrument of for unity and stability. A theses of the University of Ilorin, Nigeria. <http://www.musero.org.ng/publications>.