FUNCTIONAL EDUCATION FOR NATIONAL INTEGRATION: IMPLICATION FOR COUNSELLING

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Abstract

The paper reviews the concept of education as a functional tool for national development and attempt to highlight the uses to which education is put by various societies. It also surveys both the functional and dysfunctional roles education has played since its introduction in Nigeria by the Christian missionaries towards national integration. Given the two sides of the role of education in Nigeria towards national integration, the paper considers the present Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme in the country as a way forward if national integration must be achieved through education. It then concludes with the recommendation that the programme should be most level to avoid failure as was evident with the UPE which was then considered to be all Federal government affairs.

Education according to Udom (2005) is not just the acquisition of knowledge but the acquisition of the art of the utilization of knowledge. This conceptualization means that education is the process of acquiring knowledge and ideas that shape and condition, man attitudes action and achievement it is a process of developing the child's moral, physical emotional and intellectual power for his contribution in social change. Reconstruction, integration and overall nation unity and development, education may construct or destroy a nation depending on the utilization and application of the acquired
knowledge. Many states of the world are faced with the problem of inculcating a sense of national identity in the citizens and for strengthening the legitimacy of institutions including political authority in developed counties such as France and Britain. Many factors operate as effective socialization agents to meet the need of nation building and such are derived primarily from their histories of common government and a united struggle agents foreign foes their long possession of unity symbols and facilities such as language literature, social and political institutions (Smock and Bentsi-Enchil 1986) examples abound where nations of the world have utilized the tremendous power of education as an instrument of national policy e.g. in Athenian democracy, education is used for intellectual development, in Japan, it is used as an instrument for cultivation of benevolence, Justice propriety, Intelligence and fidelity, and in Germany, it is used as instrument for national unity (Ukeje, 1988).

In Nigeria, one of the five main cardinal national objectives as stated in the second national development plan (1970-74) and which has been endorsed as the necessary foundation for the national policy on education is the building of a united, strong and self-reliant nation. Here again education is seen as instrument for nation unity and cohesion. Unfortunately the traditional socializing agents do not function at the nation level but at ethic or communal level (Etuk, 1994).

Thus, in the absence of these socializing agencies to reinforce the sense of national identity, education could be used to affect unity, loyalty and integration in the country.

This paper is an attempt to examine the use of education to foster national integration and also to examine how the same instrument had attempted to destroy our collective identity. In doing this the theoretical framework such as the social demand approach was x-rayed. The paper then recommended a foundation educational system such as the current Universal Basic Education (UBE) to address perceived or inherent lapses in other national effort aimed at promoting national integration in the country.

**Theoretical Background**

The social demand approach is one approach that emphasizes the universality of education if positive national development is to be achieved. It was the pragmatic philosophers as pioneered by Charles Sanders Pierce that viewed education as a necessity of life. In line with this, the proponents of social demand approach also view education as a necessity of life that should be made available to all citizens. Thus, Obaji (2002) commenting on this approach holds the view that education is the consumer of goods which must be provided to every individual irrespective of ethnic, religious, political or physical disposition. In the present context that education must act as a means of national integration then it must be made available to all citizens' right from the primary school to the university level. The federal government has realized this and has introduced various policies that could make education available to everybody hence,
the recent introduction of the universal basic education (UBE) programme in the curriculum.

Education and its Negative Role Toward National Integration

The foundation of western education in Nigeria as laid by Christian missionaries emphasized religion, character training, and academic subjects based on British syllabus. For instance, one of the subjects taught during the colonial period was the British constitution, which was a way of shifting Nigerians' loyalty from their own country to Britain (Etku, 1994). The aim of the colonial education was thus to produce indigenous fanatics who would help in the propagation of western religion but mentally subservient Nigerians. The spread and distribution of educational opportunities was strictly based on the acceptability of Christianity by the people. Thus, the Hausa-Fulani states that refused the religion as a result of the already established Islam religion has little to benefit from the western education. From the foregoing one can see a nation existing as two separate entities based on religious affiliation and with western colonial education helping to widen the gap. Colonial education therefore, has contributed immensely to the present day political conflicts and national instability the country. It has been observed for instance that levels of educational attainment are decisive factors in the inter-ethnic competition for wealth and power, that much of the social and political tension in Nigeria can be attributed to the educational and economic disputes among the ethnic groups (Smoke et al.1986). From the period of independence to date, it has been struggle of who controls the centre stage of governance in Nigeria because of suspicion of ethnicity, religious bigotry and control of wealth. These trends brought in military coups between 1966 and the 1990's, the militancy in the Niger Delta region which only subsctited with amnesty granted by Late Musa Yar'adua shortly before his death in 2000. Presently there is the Islamic seat, Bokoharam insulgency in the northern part of Nigeria claiming the lives of innocent Nigerians from all parts of the country.

Ironically, any effort to rectify those disparities often provoked other serious tensions. For example, in states where education was considered a universal right, opposition will naturally be voiced to any government action that imposes ethnic, quota on admission into educational institutions or that favour certain groups over other in admission in attempts to balance educational attainment. The result is that, all the ethnic groups were forced to engage in aggressive expansion of their educational institutions that will accommodate their youths in a bid to catch up with other ethnic groups in terms of educational opportunities and attainment.

The outcome of this effort is the proliferation of state owned schools in the country. The problem then lies in the socialization process of the youth in these state owned schools. For instance, how far are these state controlled schools engaged in the training of the youths in the belief of one nation which demands their loyalty first before their state or ethnic groups? How far are the youth taught to accept people of other
ethnic groups as fellow nationals? To begin with, the admission policy of students into state controlled school is designed to cater for candidates of the state origin while candidates from other states are regarded as aliens. Secondly, it is common knowledge today, that state owned schools are used as fora for encouraging the youths to be perpetually on the war path with members of other ethnic groups. For instance, it is common knowledge the teachers in oil producing states, when teaching revenue allocation in Nigeria tell students of how the south-south region was deprived of equitable share of the National Revenue by the Yoruba and Hausas at the time agriculture was the main revenue earner in the country. But the same people today are strongly agitating against allocation for the national revenue derived from oil produced in the south-south region based on the derivation principles.

With such sentiments preached into the minds of the youth, it becomes difficult for the youths of the oil producing region to think of integrating with other two ethnic groups. No wonder, the agitation for Resource Control, and the consequence militancy of the youth in the region. Apart from teaching hidden curriculum content of sentiments in the state owned educational institutions, student's representative's organizations in the various schools are based on ethnic diversities. The modus-operandi of these organizations in terms of preaching sentiments into their ethnic members in order to attract support from them does not differ from other nationality recognized political parties. Many educational institutions have also tended to serve as grounds for the grooming of fanatics for example, political parties youth wings proliferated in various campuses in institutions of higher learning during the 1993 election period and the 1992 aborted electioneering era. Thus, a number of opposing party factions based on ethnic or regional consideration emerged among the students body.

The formation of ethnic based students' unions was a common knowledge in our tertiary institutions e.g. Igbo Students Union, Yoruba Students Union, Ijaw Students Union, Ibibio Students Union, etc. these unions are often characterized by a subjective perception of member of other ethnic groups. In the University of Calabar for instance, during the launching of the war against disunity, Professor Uya had to warn students against the coming of such acronyms as Oron phobia, Atam phobia, Anang phobia, Ibibio phobia and Efik phobia to discriminate against persons of different ethnic groups within the former Cross River State of Nigeria (Etuk, 1994). Religious factions such as the Yoruba Christian Society (YCS) and Moslem Youth Movement (MYM) are also on ground to oppose groups in the schools whose doctrines and ideologies can never be compromised. Under this type of diverse tendency existing in the very core of Nigeria Educational Institution, one wonders the possibility of education succeeding as an instrument of national integration and one would except those who have acquired it to impart it to the illiterates in a manner that would enable them perceive the nation as one entity. Unfortunately, many Nigerian educated elites rather than educate, they
indoctrinate their ethnic members in a way that makes them perpetually perceive differences between themselves and other ethnic nationalities. For instance, the Late Chief Obafemi Awolowo's Claim that there is a hierarchy of cultures in Nigeria, and that of the Yoruba's comes first is enough to make the Yoruba's see others culture as inferior (Nnoh, 1990) this sentiment originated from an educated elite of the Yoruba extraction. Again, Nnoh further noted that the intense struggle for political power caused many educated elites to canvass for support from their ethnic group members as preaching parochial ideal and sentiments into the minds of the people as in 1951 when the elites of the Action Group party preached to the westerners that a victory for NCNC in the west would mean the use of the western region cast cocoa wealth to develop the poor province of the eastern region. Also in the north, a political leader was quoted as saying "we had to teach the people to hate the southerners as those who deprived the north of their rights in a bid to secure the votes and support of the northern extraction". It is obvious that the uneducated ones look for directions in order to fix themselves comfortably into the modern and changing society, and if the direction given to these mass illiterates is the preaching of such sentiments as noted above, then the hope of using education to promote national integration is a complete mirage.

Another area of dysfunctional role of education towards national integration is socio-economic competition among ethnic groups. This competition is partially brought about by increased education and people's awareness of the contemporary bourgeois definition of politics by David Easton as the authoritative allocation of values (Etuk, 1994) Smock et al (1986) had noted that ethnic-based crises increase with greater frequency because the process of modernization tends to heighten ethnic awareness and in turn arouses ethnic tension.

Socio-economic competition is up till date with educated elites and much of the divisive role it plays often starts from conflicts between the educated one. For instance, Nnoh (1990) had noted that it was the Late Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe's resignation from the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) which almost crumbled it, and that the resignation was prompted by the defeat of Samuel Akinsanya by Ernest Ikoli who was Azikiwe's rival in the field of journalism. He further stated that a similar case took place in 1953 when the same Azikiwe expelled Eyo Ita from the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroun (NCNC) after unsuccessfully trying to persuade him to influence the disposition of local government funds in the African Continental Bank in which Azikiwe had controlling shares. There upon, the Efiks/Ibibios had to resign their membership from the NCNC to protest the insult meted out to their son, and later founded the National Independence Party (NIP) and demanded for regional autonomy different from the Ibos. Thus, Azikwe's socio-economic ambition/competition and his attempt to amass more wealth culminated in the ruining of the NYM, and the disintegration between the Ibos and the Efiks-Ibibios. It could be seen that the failure to use education to foster national integration lies even more with the educated elite. It is also a well
known fact that Lt. Col. Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu a university graduate in the Nigerian Army led the secessionist attempt by the Ibo's which resulted eventually in the Nigerian Civil War in 1967, which lasted for 30 months. This is another dysfunctional role of education towards national integration because it was an educated person who originated the war.

The foregoing notwithstanding education has contributed and can still contribute immensely to national integration in Nigeria. Some of the contributions shall be highlighted as follows:

**Educational Policies and National Integration**

The first educational policy to be used in Nigeria from independence was made by the Ashby Commission in 1960. An outstanding attempt made by this commission towards national integration was the recommendation to balance the education structure between the north and the south in order to diffuse the already rising tension over the imbalances in educational opportunities between the north and south. Another noteworthy recommendation of the commission towards national integration was the establishment of national high schools, and unity schools which was based on the commission's recognition and conviction that in bringing students of ethnic group into contact with members of other ethnic groups, tolerance and mutual understanding, would be festered, thus checking to some extent inter-ethnic differences among the educated youths. The educational policies of the first and second national development plans did not deviate much from that of the Ashby commission except in the expansion of education programmes thus there was much emphasis on adult education which was aimed at facilitating literacy and to solicitate majority of the citizens to the norms and values of the country thereby fostering their identity with them. The educational policy in the third national development plan (1978-80) featured Universal Primary Education (UPE) as an instrument of national integration. The formulation of this policy was predicted on the belief that education plays a crucial role in nation building and that the only way by which equalization could be realized in the political system was through the introduction of a free and compulsory primary education (Etuk, 1994). The decision to balance the educational structure was based on the contention that ethnic differences could be minimized if educational opportunities are equalized. It could also argued that such education was a step to inducing a sense of belonging in the citizenry in the 2004 National Policy on Education the need for adult education was explicitly expressed as giving adult vital aesthetic, cultural and civic education will improve their awareness of public affairs. The policy also called for an intensive nationwide mass literature in the country. This was equally based on their belief that by socializing majority of the citizens to the values of the country a sense of national identity could be fortressed. Of course, it could be argued that mass literacy campaign will facilitate the knowledge and the use of English Language as the common communication medium thereby reducing the problem of language among people of different ethnic groups. The recommendation
of the Onabamiro implementation committee on the national policy on education for the teaching of the National Anthem and the recitation of the National Pledge in all primary schools across the country, teaching of civic and ethics in post primary and post secondary levels of education is seen as a measure of inculcating a sense of responsibility in all youths Citizenship education including routine of singing the national anthem and saying the national pledge in the school will promote loyalty to the country and enhance the cultivation of a spirit of tolerance among people of different ethnic groups. This is education by doing otherwise called functional education.

Inter-Ethnic Mixing and National Integration

It is common knowledge that most Nigerians are reluctant to leave their homes to other places like the urban centres, so as to mix-up with the people of other ethnic groups. This is unpalatable in terms of national integration. Pell (1986) reported that the promotion of national unity among army recruits during the civil war was reinforced for Kano soldiers by their first experience of the south and the southerners. To facilitate inter ethnic mixing and national integration, the federal government in 1973 under Yakubu Gowon introduced the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in which university, colleges of education and polytechnic graduates are to serve the nation for one year in states other than their states of origin. This programme can aptly be said to have engendered the spirit of loyalty to the nation, development in the participants' positive attitudes through shared experience towards mobilization in national interest, developed common ties among the corp members and members of the community in which they service. Employers of labour have through this programme employed qualified Nigerians irrespective of their states of origin.

The NYSC programme has from its inception itself a laudable step taken by the government to realize the search for national integration. Many youths are exposed to areas which they never thought existed as part of the country. They were forced to adjust to the condition of the environment they served, learnt the language of the community to ease their interaction with the people. Cases abound where corps members got married in the community they served, thus creating opportunity for inter-ethnic marriage which is a strong force in the harmonization of ethnic differences. At the end, many of the corps members come to realize that ethnic boundaries, language and cultural differences are mere natural accidents, and such realization encourages the development of a sense of common identity. Inter-ethnic school sports competition such as the All Nigeria Universities Games (NUGA), Nigeria School Sports Federation (NSSF) and other cultural competitions have served as avenues for inter-ethnic mixing. Apart from the government deliberate actions to bring about positive inter-ethnic relationship through education, the students have also evolve ways of harmonizing ethnic differences in Nigeria. For instance in 1962 some students of the University of Ife founded the palm wine drinkers club (palmate club). The aim of which was to use palm wine as a symbol
to harmonize cultural difference in Nigeria, promote mutual understanding, unity and oneness among members irrespective of tribe, region or political difference "GYRATIONS" organized by members schools always attracted the migration of students from others schools, thereby enhancing inter-ethnic mixing.

**Universal Basic Education (UBE) and National Integration**

Given the two sides of the role of education right from colonial days towards achieving national integration it has become imperative to evolve a new system, structure or strategy that will really enhance the promotion of the ideals of national integration. This new dream will lie in the true equalization of educational opportunities through the current Universal Basic Education (UBE). Any Attempt at equalizing educational opportunities should never be seen as aiming at suppressing or depressing any group of people, but a positive effort to upgrade all those apparently disadvantaged. In this wise, it should be recognized that equality of opportunity does not mean uniformity in education, uniformity is a not a true virtue (Nnoh, 1988).

It is through a positive and progressive equalization of educational opportunities that Nigerian could achieve equity amidst diversity, patriotism with nationalism. Unity without alienation, and ultimately survive as a strong and united nation. The current UBE scheme is aimed at making education free and compulsory at primary level and junior secondary school (JSS) level. The model stipulates six years in the primary school and three years in junior secondary without a break. In it, consideration is given to every Nigeria to receive the above minimum education freely. The Universal Basic Education in Nigeria emphasizes the following:

1. Developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment for its vigorous promotion
2. The provision of the Universal Basic Education for every Nigerian child of school going age.
3. Reducing drastically the incidence of drop out from the former school system (through improved relevance, quality and efficiency)
4. Catering for the learning needs for young persons who, for one reason or another have had to interrupt their schooling through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education.
5. Ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy numeracy manipulative, communicative and life skills as well as ethnic, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning (UBE, 1999).

The universalization of basic education in keeping with the requirement of the constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria (UBE, 2004) stresses as a policy guide line equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels and eradication of illiteracy by providing where applicable free and compulsory education at all levels including adult literacy programmes. In the Nigeria context, basic education is intended
to be inclusive implying that persons in all manners and conditions of physical, spatial and psychological existence will benefit from the programmes and giving special attention to special groups with special needs of all sectors of the population.

It is hoped that UBE scheme if fully and well implemented would afford greater majority of Nigeria populace skills in general literacy and numeracy. As more people including adults become literate they will derive maximum social, economic and cultural benefits from membership of the society, peace and harmony would reign and national integration guaranteed. The UBE by making recipients literate will in turn accelerate the process of general enlightenment in the society, play a vital role in socialization, occupational preparation and promote structural integration in a plural society like Nigeria by harmonizing economic and occupational opportunities and raising the level of self reliance, dedication, responsibility, national loyalty and a sense of co-existence, co-operation, fair play and understanding (Wang, 1987 in Opara, 2000). Through the creation and spread of literacy which provides a broader communication skill in a multilingual society, national integration is fostered. The use of English Language in teaching and learning in our formal schools implies that all the UBE recipients will be literate in English Language which will make interaction with members of other ethnic groups easier and thereby eliminating the negative ability to hear and understand one another irrespective of place of origin.

Finally, to realize the goals of the UBE scheme through its proper implementation, the professionalization of teaching is hereby suggested Quacks should no longer be tolerated in the teaching profession. Quality of education is not possible without quality of teachers, hence the common practice, whereby the school system in the country employs inferior teachers because of financial considerations should no longer hold and the practice of saddling one teacher with upward of 50-60 pupils as against the National Policy on Education (NPE) recommended 1:30 in a class is not conducive to quality education and must be stopped (NPE 1981).

Implication for Counselling

Education and indeed functional one is the greatest investment any country can engage in, it is through education that the necessary skills are acquired. Basic education scheme is clearly one of the tools for promoting national development and integration. The formulation of ideas and strategies in bringing about national development and integration is entirely an educational process. Self reliance better relationships, effective citizenship, national consciousness and national unity are fostered through education. As players in the education industry, it behooves us to support fully the UBE programme since it is evident that it is a good instrument for national integration. The role of counsellor in school is imperative between wards; the school to make sure the policy succeeds. All forces that have been identified that are likely to affect the programme
negatively must be speedily addressed and nipped in the bud. The UPE programme failed because it was considered a solely government project. This is a misconception that must be eliminated right away. Rural and Urban communities must not only be properly educated about the programme but should be made compulsory participants. This will engender a sense of belongingness and ownership. Community based agencies, association and organizations such as parent Teachers Association (PTA), Village Education Committees (VEC), Tradition rulers, market women, youths and farmers must all be involved. The operational modalities and level of involvement can be worked out and monitoring and supervision provided by State Universal Basic Education and Local Education Authorities (LEA). The Partnership Improvement of Primary Education (PIPE) programme should be strengthened and made popular to ensure more community participation.

In all, every level of Government, the policy makers and operators should realize that Guidance and Counselling is the cornerstone of a realizable and meaningful educational policy and growth. Professional Guidance counsellors available all over the country should be given opportunity to serve at formulation and implementation of educational policies. Make guidance and counselling functional as the operators of its services are strategically placed in the national programmes and the ills threatening the unity of this country would be drastically reduced if not eliminated.

References


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