



Geography Education as a tool for National Integration in Nigeria

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Abstract

The search for national unity and integration by Nigeria as a nation was as a result of the various ethnic units, since Nigeria is heterogeneous societies which consist of diverse culture, traditions, customs, religion, nationalities, race, tribes and languages. This paper examined the contribution of geography education to the continuous existence of Nigeria as a united, indissoluble and sovereign nation. The study adopted a qualitative technique through the content analysis of documents, reports, journals, books and articles. At the end of the study, it was discovered that geography education fosters national unity and integration; plays important role in developing the knowledge and the skills to equip future generations with the tools to adapt to and mitigate potentially catastrophic national change and as well as enhance social, economic and environmental sustainable development. Therefore, the study suggested that education should be autonomous from the realm of politics. It should be made purely a constitutional matter with adequate allocation of fund to ensure she contributes full potential to national unity.

Keywords: Geography, Education, Nigeria, National integration, Unity.

1.0 Introduction

Geography education is a very important discipline which incorporates two distinct field of study into its teaching; they are education and geography. It has been discovered in repeated studies that geography education has a direct effect on the national integration and infrastructural development of a nation. Nigeria a multinational state, that can be describe as a pluralist society, is inhabited by more than 250 ethnic groups with over 500 distinct languages all identifying with a wide variety of cultures (Fadeiye, 2005; Falola & Heaton, 2008; Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), 2017). The three largest ethnic groups are the Hausa–Fulani in the north, Yoruba in the west, and Igbo in the east; comprising

over 60% of the total population (Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), 2019). There are approximately two hundred and fifty different languages and over four hundred dialects (Akamere, 2001; Fadeiye, 2005; Falola & Heaton, 2008). Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and the seventh most populous country in the world, with an estimated 206 million inhabitants as of late 2019 (World Meter, 2020). Nigeria has the third-largest youth population in the world, after India and China, with more than 90 million of its population under the age of eighteen. (CIA, 2013).

Nigeria has the largest economy in Africa and is the world's 24th largest economy according to the list by the International Monetary Fund (2020 estimates), worth



more than \$500 billion and \$1 trillion in terms of nominal Gross Domestic Product and purchasing power parity, respectively. The official language of Nigeria is English, chosen to facilitate linguistic unity at the national level (Mann, 1990). Nigeria is divided roughly in half between Muslims, who live mostly in the north, and Christians, who live mostly in the south. (Cameroon, adjacent to that portion, is predominantly Christian) Nigeria has respectively, the fifth-largest Muslim population in the world and the sixth-largest Christian population in the world (Pew Research Center, 2020) with the constitution ensuring freedom of religion. A minority of the population practice religions indigenous to Nigeria, such as those native to the Igbo and Yoruba ethnicity.

Like all other African countries, Nigeria is a product of arbitrary boundaries drawn by the European colonialists to resolve their own differences and solve individual territorial and economic problems without any regard for the interests and compatibility of the people in their colonies. As a result, traditionally hostile people are lumped together to make a nation state. Hence, in Nigeria there are people with different socio-cultural backgrounds and different ethnic and religious backgrounds. One of the reasons for social and political instability in Nigeria is believed to be the problem of ethnicity (Adesina, 2017). Because of the various ethnic groups with different social, cultural, political and religious backgrounds, it has become almost impossible to be truly integrated (Ogunmodimu, 2015). Thus it can be assumed that the greatest challenge facing Nigeria today is the threat to her national unity. Since the end of the Nigerian civil war, Nigeria has moved from one crisis to another owing to contradictory steps taken by past governments. Perhaps the most serious problems in Nigeria today

which have made nation-building a mere construct are the issues of ethno-regional affiliation and religious crisis (Okoroma, 2006).

Moreover, large numbers of critics and academic prowess have been committed towards integrating the country. Insecurity in the North led to the declaration of a state of emergency in three states in the zone namely; Yobe, Adamawa and Bornu states. Despite this, the killing continues and the worst aspect of it is that in recent times, educational institutions have become targets with many male students killed and hundreds of young girls abducted. Besides, there is a spill-over effect with insecurity spilling over to other parts of the North like Zamfara state which had for long been a peaceful state compared to other states in the North (Daily Trust, 2019). Apart from these areas, conflict zones like the South-South where conflict between Multinational Oil Companies (MNOCs) and militant youths in the region. Adebukola, (2014) writes that this conflict has resulted in the impoverishment of the people. Kidnappings and bank fraud complement the region. Adebukola, (2014) also reported that the Niger Delta militancy actually heralded organized violent crimes and major security threats into the country. This manifests in random shooting and killing of innocent people, kidnapping of expatriates and destruction of huge public and private properties most especially in the oil and gas sector of Nigeria by different groups like MEND, MASSOB and other violent groups in the South – South region.

The Niger-Delta militants highlighted the political and economic marginalization of the Niger-Delta region that produces the wealth of the nation as reasons for their actions. Another manifestation of need for integration in Nigeria is the activities of the



Islamic Boko Haram Sect. While the Niger–Delta militancy can be viewed as political, the Boko Haram menace is religious and ideological. It came in the form of terrorism similar to the in approach used by the notorious international terrorist groups like the Al-Qaeda the Taliban. Many Christians and Muslims alike were and are still being killed by these sects that claim that Sharia law must be entrenched in the country and Western Education is a crime. Churches and public places are being bombed by the suicide bombers. Of recent, they seemed to have acquired sophisticated weaponry which they deploy to killing of students in Schools in Northern Nigeria and bombing of police stations and army barracks armed robbery is another major insecurity issue in Nigeria. People hardly sleep with their eyes closed in most urban centres and even in broad day light people are gunned down by armed robbers. Rape has equally assumed an astronomical proportion in the country. It is in fact a complementary part of any violent action of recent as victims of kidnapping and armed robbery are often reportedly raped. Female gender is being terrorized by these rapists regardless of age, thus making the country unsafe for women and girls.

However, Nigeria seeks to be one unified nation, with a single purpose and with a people who share common goals. There is no doubt that Nigeria is desirous of solving her ethno-regional crisis, religious violence, political instability, insecurity and others, through education which led to the reviews of the post-colonial education delivery and the emergence of National Policy on Education, stressing a more proactive approach to the teaching of the subjects, and to reinvigorate its teaching in schools in order to achieve nation-building (Ibukun & Aboluwodi, 2010). This Nigeria's new approaches to reconstruct and integrate her

society includes taking trips to the regions in order to improve the understanding of the present situation with a view to gaining insights into the prevailing situation, anticipate the future in order to better prepare for its many regional and environmental challenges. Disciplines including social studies; political science; psychology; History; religious studies and others, have all contributed to national integration through their teachings and well as conducting researches, yet the problem of achieving unity still started at us. This is where the study of Geography becomes inevitable contributing her own quota, with the quest to weld together the ethnic and regional cracks in the society. There is need to project the contributions and prospects of geography education as her counterparts in other fields. This paper therefore appraises the discipline contribution to the nation's quest towards integration with the hope of suggesting ways of re-vitalising her effort.

Literature Review

Geography education

With this level of diversity, the need for integration is great and part of ways identified by the nation to achieve harmony is through education. Education enhances the development of values and also defines the level of development for individuals, groups, and societies. Thus, access to education promotes positive attitudes that enable progress. It is clear here that unequal access to education creates unequal opportunities and uneven development, which in turn undermines stability and development. Prior to 1977 Nigeria operated an educational policy inherited from Britain at independence. The inability of this policy to satisfy the national aspirations of the country rendered it unpopular. In 1969 a National Curriculum Conference was organised which reviewed the inherited



curriculum and identified new national goals for Nigeria's education. A National Seminar was organised by the National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) in 1973 under the Chairmanship of Chief S. O. Adebo. This gave rise to the National Policy on Education in 1977 (Okoroma, 2000).

In education as in other fields of human endeavour, every official action of an organisation must have a backing or a basis. It is this purpose that a policy serves. A policy defines the area in which decisions are to be made, but it does not make the decision. It usually provides a general guide that facilitates decision-making. Educational policies provide the direction for educational activities (Okoroma, 2006). The National Policy on Education is anchored on Nigeria's philosophy on education as enunciated through the nation's objectives. Nigeria has five main national objectives as provided by the Second National Development Plan and accepted as the necessary foundation for the National Policy on Education. The main aims and objectives of Nigeria's education policy arising from the 1977, 1981 and 2004 editions are the building of:

- a free and democratic society
- a just and egalitarian society
- a united strong and self-reliant nation
- a great and dynamic economy
- a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens.

Geography is an all-encompassing discipline that seeks an understanding of Earth and its human and natural complexities, not merely where objects are, but also how they have changed and come to be. Geography is often defined in terms of two branches: human geography and physical geography. Human geography is concerned with the study of people and their communities, cultures,

economies, and interactions with the environment by studying their relations with and across space and place. Physical geography is concerned with the study of processes and patterns in the natural environment like the atmosphere, hydrosphere, biosphere, and geosphere. The four historical traditions in geographical research are spatial analyses of natural and the human phenomena, area studies of places and regions, studies of human-land relationships, and the Earth sciences. Geography has been called "the world discipline" and "the bridge between the human and the physical sciences".

Geography is the investigation of the places that make up our world. Places are specific areas of the earth's surface, and can range from a locality to a country to a major world region.

Geography answers our questions about why they have their particular environmental and human characteristics, how and why they are changing, and their economic, political and social significance. The characteristics of places studied in Geography include population, climate, economy, landforms, built environment, soils and vegetation, communities, water resources, cultures, minerals, attitudes and values, and landscape quality. This examines the uniqueness of individual places as well as the similarities between them, sometimes using comparative analysis to identify the effects of factors such as climate, relative location, history, culture and governance. It also includes an exploration of what places mean to people, and the ways in which where we live shapes our lives.

Integration

The word integration suggests a process of structural linkage between two or more parts of a system or systems (Onwuka, 1982). According to Merriam-Webster dictionary



Integration is incorporation as equals into society or an organization of individuals of different groups, such as races. National integration can equally be referred to as nation building, national unity, national cohesion, national loyalty and oneness. It can equally mean: unity of purpose, agreement and common position to come together as an indivisible or indissoluble national entity. According to Maurice Duverger (1976), national integration is a “process of unifying a society which tends to make it a harmonious city, based on an order its members regard as equitably harmonious “National integration can equally be referred to as nation building, national unity, national cohesion, national loyalty and oneness. It can equally mean: unity of purpose, agreement and common position to come together as an indivisible or indissoluble national entity.

There are different forms of integration (Fadeye, 2005). Sofadeke (2012) writes that Socio-political integration for instance, involves economic and political development. The nation has to integrate its economic and political forces with the view to producing and promoting national survival. Cultural integration involves making all Nigerians identify with a national ideology. Both social integration and cultural integration are necessary for national survival, while national integration could simply be described as an attempt to bring together the different potentials of the nation (human and natural resources) for the common goal. In other words, national integration is an aspect of nation building which includes the process of modernization in all aspects. National integration also involves a concern for political order, social and economic welfare. Hence, in order to promote peaceful co-existence among the cultural groups,

there is a need for cultural integration with the view to promoting national integration.

Justification for Geography education as a tool of national integration

The teaching and learning of geography in Nigeria started in the second half of the 19th century which was a primary school subject. When secondary and university education started, geography was included in the subjects of study. According to Okpala (1990), geography teaching in Nigerian schools was under the British influence, both in personnel and philosophy. The textbooks were the same as those used in British schools and regional geography was the main focus. According to Ajayi (2001), Geography has passed through three distinct stages since its introduction into Nigerian school's curriculum and it is now entering the fourth stage in its development. These periods are: (a) The colonial period - 1948-1960, (b) indigenization era- 1960-1970, (c) The consolidation – 1971 to date. However, in the wake of national independence, there was a steady growth of geography in Nigeria as indigenous geographers such as Mabogunje (1970) began criticizing the fundamental objectives, content and methods of school geography, which they found inadequate for the needs of Nigerian children. The geographic studies of North America, the British Isles and South East Asia were removed and there was an emphasis of study on the local region, with most of the teachers being Nigerians. As the country struggled towards relevant education and vocational independence, new education policies were formulated. Geography became a senior secondary subject, with a little of it infused in social studies being taught in the junior secondary schools. It was also an elective to be chosen in place of history or literature in English. This relegation of geography was



perhaps the beginning of its difficulties in Nigeria. Several other factors have been attributed to its unpopularity among Nigerian students; Okpala (1988) identifies them as the wide scope of the subject, poor results in school certificate geography examinations, geography being unrelated to their future career and poor teaching. As a geography teacher in Nigeria, it is easy to understand these problems. Geography seems to be the most difficult subject to teach in Nigerian secondary schools. Geographical education therefore represents an important vehicle for citizens of all ages to help them understand the complexity of the national integration goal and what can (and should) be done to achieve a more sustainable future. As 'the science for integration', Geography has an increasingly important role to play in developing the knowledge and the skills to equip future generations with the tools to adapt to and mitigate potentially catastrophic national change.

The study of geography is very crucial to the unity and development of people all around the world. Many other scholars support this view and empirical studies have shown that this discipline can foster national and international unity (Gregory, 2000; Okpala, 1990; Fan, Monday & Tandu, 2014) as well as enhance social, economic and environmentally sustainable development. This is possible because geography is about understanding conditions in other places and our connections with those places. Students (present and future citizens of the world) should learn about the land, climate, economy, politics and culture of their environment as well as of other places.

Let's move on to the topic of urbanisation, which is also closely related to geography. It's a hot topic in Nigeria. A big question is how to build sustainable cities, especially in

developing countries like ours. What's the relationship between geography and urbanisation? Big cities need to be supported by economic development. Increases in population and city expansion have to be supported by energy and clean air and water. Urbanisation also needs large areas of land as well as communication and transportation infrastructures. It is geographers' job to assess how much energy a given level of urbanisation require show much land and clean water this needs, and how to go about infrastructure construction. The pace of urbanisation is very rapid, which has caused a lot of problems. Until recently, insufficient attention has been paid to protecting natural resources and environment. Nigeria geographers have drawn attention to the problems and had an important role in the current policy shift.

Many people in the different regions of the country are very negative about national integration for fear of been dominated. They definitely present challenges to development and unity. Geography is a good way of thinking the world today and identifying opportunities and challenge; to live together in diversity. This is very important, as the role of geography is not only to describe but also to understand the world in a holistic way.

Geographers have been working suggesting ways to create lifestyles in small cities and in countryside with the same good conditions as in mega cities but without the problems. It's not easy. In Nigeria, land planning was considered only as urban planning for a long time. Today, we have to take a holistic approach towards land planning, encompassing rural planning, small-city planning, and mega-city planning. Furthermore, geography teaches students about their own place, and how and why it is changing. This provides them with an



understanding of some of the influences on their locality and their lives, and in turn helps them to make informed decisions on a range of personal and community issues that can sustain integration. It helps students to understand a range of global issues, such as international migration and its consequences, pressures on global water supplies, climate change, world cities, global food production and consumption, and international geopolitical conflicts over resources, ethnicity, ideologies and borders. Geography also teaches students about places and countries throughout the world, as a foundation for understanding other peoples and cultures and national events and trend.

Geography teaches how places are linked to other places throughout the world in a variety of ways, such as through natural processes, the movement of people, flows of trade and investment, cultural influences, the exchange of ideas and information, and international agreements. Geography examines their effects on places, the changes they produce, and the ways these changes can be managed, and shows students how to see their own place in a much wider context. Geography teaches students about aspects of Nigeria's environment, demography, economy and society that are matters of regular public debate. An understanding of these questions will equip students to be informed citizens in the future.

Conclusion

National integration is crucial for creating a strong, united country which is an essential precondition for all progress and prosperity. Since the basic functions of the school is to prepare the society for a change, its role is to ensure national integration is rightly unenviable. Geography is an intrinsic part of national identities, and geography teachers can do a lot in training minds of their

students on aspects of environment and regional values. They need not devote separate teaching hours to impact the concept the national integration. In this context the teachers teaching Social Geography have a major role to play, and must try to highlight our current social and economic problems like literacy, religious dogmatism, regional disparity, economic backwardness, language, and fanaticism. Teachers of geography subject also play a dominant role for pointing out our climatic unity, interdependence of the states and our natural and mineral resources, which can inculcate a feeling of belongingness to the nation. They may point out element of commonness in languages, culture and heritage.

Recommendation

Education is an instrument for integration. It liberates people from poverty and ignorance. It is an investment in people which brings unlimited benefits to the society. Based on this the following suggestions were made:

1. Geography education should be made compulsory at post primary institutions to help in inculcating the need values and knowledge needed to unite the country.
2. Giving the importance of education in national integration, mismanagement of educational resources at any level should be made a serious offence attracting a imprisonment without option for fine.
3. There is urgent need to ensure facilities such as classrooms, offices, laboratories, workshops, libraries, power for teaching and learning geography at all levels.
4. The importance of funds for carrying out any activity need not be over-emphasized. Need to review and allocate more funds to education sector is hence very important.

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