

Education for Social Transformation in Nigeria

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Suspensions and distrust among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria have led to bickering among the various group leaders resulting in their failure to achieve cohesion. The British colonial administration actually laid the foundation for the emerging political crises that followed, since its policy had been designed to favour the North, whose leaders had been programmed to take over from the colonial officials. The crises had led to the first military coup, a situation that re-enforced this mutual suspicion which invariably gave birth to a serious crack within the ranks of the political class. It is imperative to build mutual trust among the different ethnic groups in the country which entails engaging in serious educational reform with a focus on education whose purpose is pluralistic, inclusive and transformative. Adopting the option of social transformation, therefore, is a step towards building trust and social participation among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Keywords: social transformation, social justice, British colonial administration, social capital resources, inclusive education

Introduction

Many factors account for Nigeria's dysfunctional state; perhaps the most critical ones are institutional problems, structural decay, and suspicion and distrust among its diverse ethnic groups. Signs of dysfunctional institutions in Nigeria began to emerge shortly after the exit of the British officials. It started with serious cracks among the ranks of the political class leading to rivalries and bickering. Individuals and groups soon appealed to ethnic and religious sentiments, a situation that culminated eventually to ethnic bigotry, religious bifurcation (loyalty either to Christianity or Islam) and regional affiliation, which today have become the major obstacles to Nigeria's cohesive experiment (Lewis, 2006). It is in light of this problem that I intend to argue that Nigeria's cohesive and sustainable efforts rest on an effective use of education as a resource for social transformation. For the education system to perform this role there may be need to address the issue of access, funding and quality considered to be fundamental to achieving effective results. Above all, efforts may be required to integrate the marginalised and the vulnerable members of the society, through employment policies, for effective social transformation. Deployment of social capital resource is equally desirable in this quest for national integration.

Education in Nigeria

Education started with the Christian missionaries in Nigeria. Their arrival in Nigeria was informed by the need to resettle the freed slaves from America and Britain, and to evangelise them as the situation then required. However, they soon encountered the problem of communication with the natives, a factor which possible engendered the setting up of schools

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where interpreters could be trained. There was also the need to train catechists and lay readers who were to assist the evangelists in their activities. The three missions that championed this course, Church Missionary Society (CMS), Wesleyan and Catholic soon engaged in competition especially when the government decided to assist them with grants. Their efforts were, however, limited to an elementary stage with little impact on the communities where they were. Mart's (2011) argument (citing Omolewa, 2006), is that Christian missionaries "were eager to use literacy training to introduce Christianity and win converts to their religion" (p. 193).

The colonial administration's decision to establish schools in Nigeria was not borne out of the interest it had for the people, rather it needed some artisans to assist in running the imperial state (Fafunwa, 1995). The same view has equally been expressed by Ajayi (2008), "the missions in the South were interested in education as an instrument of evangelism, while the colonial administration saw the schools as agencies for producing various categories of minor functionaries (such as clerks, junior technicians in public works, sanitary inspectors etc.)" (p.3). It, therefore, means that the colonial administration's interest, in this regard, was informed by exigencies.

The post-colonial education experience in Nigeria does not differ markedly from that of the previous colonial years. While the colonial education was said to be too theoretical, the post-colonial education's emphasis on literary development seems to place it on the same level with the former. Akinlua (2011) argues that "the school building, the teacher and the time-tables that operated the grammar schools of fifty years ago are still the same set of instruments that are offered to operate the new system" (p. 96). It will interest Akinlua to learn that emphasis is still being placed on paper certification rather than the development of skills and competencies. Unfortunately, these certificates may sometimes offer little assistance to those who hold them since skills required to perform in the world of work are sometimes located outside the certificates held. It means the system will have to focus on the development of skills and competencies.

Apart from what may be regarded as structural defects in Nigeria's education system, there is also the problem of inequality in access and attainments across the regions. While it is argued that the emphasis on certificates as a measure of educational attainment looks defective in this age of knowledge economy, the problem of imbalance in educational opportunity in Nigeria seems to offer more challenges. The consequence of this imbalance is aptly expressed by Aminu: *"Certain sections of this country will be highly disturbed about their future in a united Nigeria if they study the pattern of higher educational opportunities in the country. It is this kind of disturbance which promotes among the people some actions counteractions, mutual suspicion, nepotism and loss of confidence in the concept of unity"*(p. 12).

Education may provide a recipe the country requires to change the prevalent prejudice among the different segments of Nigerian population. Much as education may provide this resource, it appears the system, as constituted at present, suffers from the problem of access, funding, and quality. What seems the relic of the British colonial educational policy in Nigeria, access to education, has been a major problem in Nigeria's educational policy. This notion is reported by Mustapha (2006) who reasoned that *"by 1958, only 9% of the children of primary school age were enrolled in the North; the comparative figure for the South was 80%"* (p. 8). Though Nigeria has attempted to reverse this trend, not much has been achieved in this respect as the North is currently still far behind the South educationally. In a release entitled: *Nigeria Education Fact Sheet* the United State Embassy in Nigeria (2012) makes the following remark: *"education indicators are poor nationwide, and the greatest need for assistance is in the*

predominantly Muslim north” (p. 1). It goes further to contend that “non-school attendance is highest among states in the Northeast and Northwest zones. 72% of primary age children never attended school in Borno state. This compares with less than 3% in most southern zones” (p.1).

By 1958 the school enrolment in Northern Nigeria was 9%, and now in 2015 it is less than 30% of the primary school age children who attend school in the North. Apparently these differences in educational attainment among the two regions spilled into structural differences, paving the way for social and economic disparities. Demand for equal representation in the state’s public offices sometimes ignores this historical fact. Attempts to create this equal representation, in the past, have led to contraptions such as federal character policy and quota system. Its practice has created tension among the various ethnic groups in the state, since merit is no longer used for appointments into offices in the state.

The South was disappointed with the North as it had the opportunity to redress this imbalance in education, but would rather prefer to re-cycle its elite. For about thirty years, the North ruled the country. The result is the large number of almajiri (itinerant children under Qur’anic instructor) in the Muslim North. The Ministry of Education gives the figure, 9.5 million of almajiri children in Northern Nigeria (Nigeria Education Fact Sheet, 2012). Some attempts to reform the system have failed in the past.

Though Nigeria education system is faced with the issue of quality and inadequate funding, of particular interest is the role of the political elite in the making of the education system. The British administration left behind an education system whose logic is to perpetuate dominance (elitist in form), a system that was heartily embraced by the political elite. Its process is captured by Nyirenda (1996) when he says: “the educative process domesticates people where there exists a dominant culture of silence. In this culture people are taught to accept what is handed down to them by the ruling elite without questioning. Hence their understanding of social reality is limited to what they are taught and told to accept and believe” (p. 9).

The educative process does not provide the individuals with the power to think for themselves, hence the social reality known to them is that which is represented by the political elite. Whereas for Patil (2012) “the educational system of any society is related to its total social system. The goals and needs of (such) social system get reflected in the functions it lays down for educational system and the form in which it structures it to fulfill those functions” (p. 207). How adequate is Nigeria’s education system in meeting the needs of the social system especially in the area of social and political consciousness? Instructional delivery in the system only promotes rote learning, hence it offers no practical value in this age of knowledge economy.

The education system in Nigeria, as constituted in structure, content and approach, does not differ from what obtained in Asia as reported by Richmond (2007). For him, “*in Asia, much education revolves around rote learning*”, and; “*the inadequacies of teaching through rote memorisation and the problem of relevance are intertwined. If students are to memorise rather than to understand and criticise, they are unlikely to realise that the education they are receiving is irrelevant to the needs of their home countries*” (p. 3).

The implication of this educative process is that the “knowledge and skills that are required if individuals and countries are to be competitive in the global world” (2007, p.5), get disconnected and the culture of teaching to pass examinations is promoted. Sulaiman (2012) traced this culture of examination in students’ assessments to the colonial education system. According to her, “[t]he colonial education in Nigeria focused strongly on examination. Most schools in the colonial days were ranked and assisted financially on the basis of their examination results.” (p.98). Oyebamiji and Omordu (2011) contended that “this stress on

examinations is still used in the contemporary period to judge results and to obtain qualification for jobs in government and private sector in Nigeria” (p. 101). The persistence of this pervasive education policy in Nigeria is a testimony to the presence of colonial relics in the society. Adding to this policy of “stress on examination” are the “traditions of authority and obedience” and the ethics of respect and humility which define the relationship between students and teachers in Nigerian schools.

The greatest problem that may be associated with Nigerian intellectuals, who are products of Nigerian educational system, is captured in Fowler’s study (as cited in Mekoa, 2005) *“I do not wish to imply that no independent African thought exists. It does, and it is encouraging. However, there is too much tendency to depend on Western models in African intellectual, social and economic development”* (p. 415). Mekoa is right to have held the view that the intellectual training of the African intellectuals during the colonial era did not create any radical change in their intellectual outlook. Their inability to domesticate their educational needs in their various education policies points to this fact. Apparently the intellectuals who had been educated to think, to behave, to live a way of life like the colonisers, and fashion social and political policies in their countries to model their masters’ try to justify Mekoa’s. Post-independent education policies in Nigeria were inspired by the British colonial education system, the same experience that informed the state’s social and political structure. The elite have made little efforts to change this structure, but the results have remained largely ineffective, and the consequence is that they are in direct confrontation with the masses.

The alienated group requires an adequate educational experience to be able to confront their problems. Steps towards this educational experience demand radical reforms in the state’s educational system which may include conscious removal of obstacles to access education by the vulnerable groups (marginalised and disadvantaged), adequate financial commitment, and quality control among others. Such radical reforms, according to the Commonwealth Consortium for Education (2008), will have to involve strong leadership and imaginative policies emphasizing greater equity and inclusiveness leading inevitably to the removal of obstacles to access for the poorest and most disadvantaged and the pursuit of skills acquisition. The pursuit of inclusive education is imperative in any efforts to arrest obstacles to education and to promote its access and equity in Nigeria. Education is an essential resource that defines individuals’ social relations and strengthens bond among citizens. Trust is embedded in such social relations.

Apart from an educational imbalance which was said to have been created deliberately by the colonial administration, the country had been polarised along ethnic and religious lines. According to Kifordu (2011) *“ethnicity and religion have been practically synonymous with Nigeria”* (p.21). Besides, the military (which was then under the control of the Northern elite) also went ahead to undermine the federal structure, abolish- the regional control over resources (Kifordu, 2011), centralise- power and promote- political dominance by a section of the country. Social transformation becomes a viable option in this respect and its viability is premised on the inclusion of marginalised groups, devolution of power, strict adherence to the principles of federalism, vigorous attack on the issue of inequalities among social classes and groups, issue of relevance in education and the involvement of social capital resources.

Pre- and post-colonial political structure of Nigeria

The major objective of the colonial administration was basically economic (Goucher, LeGuin, & Walton, 1998). In order to achieve this objective, the administration went ahead to register its presence in the country (Rafiu, Owolabi, & Folasayo, 2009). The structure of the country became

a challenge to the administration; hence it makes some efforts to bring together disparate ethnic groups for administrative convenience. The result was the formation of Northern and Southern protectorates and Lagos Colony. According to Mustapha, (2006) the arrangement was intended “*to save the British treasury from direct financial responsibility for the administration of Northern Nigeria*” (p.3). Eventually, the formation of Northern and Southern protectorates culminated in what Rafiu, Owolabi and Folasayo (2009) called “*...a ‘fraudulent’ social contract and not of ‘negotiated will’ of the welded parts*” (p.157), and for Oyeranmi, “*the so-called Nigerian nationhood was founded on absolute fraud*” (2007, p.3).

So, Nigeria was created based on what Mustapha contended was “*implicit concept of one country, many peoples, and very little was done to create unifying institutions and processes for these peoples*” (p. 11). Perhaps one of the reasons many people in Southern Nigeria still consider the entity ‘Nigeria’ a fraudulent contraption as indicated above. Akinjide, (2013) did not see how Nigeria was created with implicit concept of one country where country is defined in terms of “people”. According to him, “*...what the British amalgamated was administration of the North and the South and not the people of the North and the South...*” (p.34). The amalgamation was initiated basically in the interest of the British administration because “*the North is poor and they have no resources to run the protectorate of the North. That they have no access to the sea; that the South has resources and have educated people*” (p.35). For economic reasons, British administration joined together two disparate territories to become Nigeria.

The colonial administration was said to have used subtle methods including a divide and rule system, perhaps that was the only option apposite to achieving its economic objective. The decision to use the divide and rule system came on the heels of the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates which brought together peoples of different cultural and religious backgrounds. Eventually, Nigeria ended up with three regions, namely, North, West and East. Each of the regions was dominated by Hausa and Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo. The power play among the dominant groups over who controlled power and the state’s resources brought to the fore the weak political structure left behind by the British colonial administration. Mustapha aptly alluded to this structural defect when he contended that “*the structural and psychological divide woven into the very structure of the colonial state permeated the society and remains engrained in (the country’s) political life.*” (p.3)

In this regard, the post-colonial administration in Nigeria was characterised by disenchantment filled with anger and resentment, especially among the political groups in the South. When the British administration disengaged finally it left behind three major ethnic groups whose political elite did not share the same value orientation. This view was captured by Kifordu (2011) who had rightly submitted that “*value homogeneity as a precondition for social order seems to be far removed from reality in politics like Nigeria where groups have highly different social structures, and varying historical and cultural backgrounds*” (p.18).

Education, social capital and social transformation in Nigeria

The desire for cohesive relations among its diverse ethnic groups must have led to the endless search for stable polity in Nigeria in recent years. But at this moment there seems to be the need for social transformation which perhaps promises to be a viable option. The notion of social transformation suggests that there is at least a problem that requires urgent attention, and in Nigeria it is the problem of structural defect among others which has engendered suspicion and mistrust among its different ethnic groups. Meanwhile, let us examine this notion of social

transformation within the Nigerian context, and while doing this we shall endeavour to see how it can further be strengthened through the medium of social capital.

There are different conceptions of social transformation. For Dahal (2007) “*social transformation is a process of wide-ranging change in the thinking, nature, structure, institution, rules, technology and cultural patterns of society through human actions*” (p. 1). It is about the elimination of class distinctions and the promotion of mass participation in politics. Brennan, King, -and Lebeau (2004) contend that social transformation implies some fundamental changes in society’s core institutions, the polity and the economy, with major implications for relationships between social groups or classes.

Transformation in Nigeria should, therefore, be premised on the integration of different segments in the society, inclusion of marginalised ethnic minorities, equitable distribution of the state’s resources, and promotion of secular state and democratic culture. The efforts of the present administration in Nigeria to address what is generally called the ‘national question’ seem to have led to agitation for national conference. There had been two of these conferences convened to address the problems of structural imbalance, security in the state, promotion of sectional interests, agitations by ethnic nationalities leading to mutual distrust, fiscal federalism, marginalisation of minority groups among others. No reasonable results had been recorded. Trust is required to build the bridges needed to forge unity among these groups.

The notion of trust is part of African culture, and has been a strong cohesive force among different African communities. Indeed, this notion is explicitly written in the heart of communal relations in Nigeria where family bond rules the lives of members in a relation. Thus, at every level, in Nigerian communities, an individual is socially connected to his family, associates and friends. Sometimes such a connection is defined in relation to what may loosely be classified as *whom we know*, a term that can be used to define social capital in the African context. But Nigeria needs an effective education system to be able to sustain social capital among its various groups.

The different conceptions of social capital point to the imperative of trust as an element of social relations. Putman’s explanation is suggestive of this notion. “By social capital,” Putman’s study (as cited in Mikiewicz, Jonasson, Gudmundsson, Blondal & Korczewka, 2011) defines social capital thus: “*I mean features of social life - network, norms, and trust - that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives.*” These features of social life Siisiainen (2000) identifies as three components of Putman’s concept of social capital, namely, moral obligations and norms, social values (especially trust) and social networks (especially voluntary organisations). Siisiainen goes further to argue that “*trust creates reciprocity and voluntary associations*” and for Putman in Siisiainen (2000) “*association facilitates communication and improves the flow of information about the trustworthiness of individuals*” (p. 5).

Trust, for Siisiainen, “*helps to build and holds together the relations between the members (of associations)*” (p. 6). For Adjargo (2012) “*the idea of social capital is that, one’s family, neighbours, friends and associates constitute an important asset that can be called upon during crisis as well as during ceremonies*” (p. 219). And Christoforou (2012) “*the resources that individuals obtain through their social ties and that allow them to secure social status and social power*” (p. 8). These social ties explain the natural world of Africans.

While education, as a resource, may attend to the needs of the alienated groups, social capital should necessarily form the tool to repair the broken bridge which holds together Muslims and Christians, and North and South in Nigeria. Indeed, social capital can conveniently

be used to handle the problems of suspicion and distrust the most critical and divisive elements in Nigerian society. Though efforts to build a social network intended for social ties and relations among Nigerians were undertaken by General Yakubu Gowon (then Head of State) shortly after the civil war in 1973, the efforts have yielded little results. This social network came in the form of the National Youth Service Corps programme which he established to build mutual trust across the different divides in Nigeria, though in principle it was designed primarily to bring back the elusive communal relations destroyed by the war.

The only social practice that has created its social relevance among Nigerians is soccer. It has remained the only game that has achieved a relative integrative force among the citizens, though the complex nature of Nigerian society makes it less viable for social integration. Soccer does not offer what the country requires to create social justice and social participation. Attacking the structural defects and institutional decay in Nigerian society must be pursued with vigour, as this seems to be an issue that can ensure one-ness among the ethnic nationalities. In other words, Nigeria requires radical steps to be able to ensure that common goals are achieved and national cohesion is established among its citizens. In order to ensure a sustainable democratic culture in Nigeria, the political class and the elite must be given an intellectual orientation that is providing them with education that will change their consciousness.

The habit of manipulating the thought of the alienated class for political purposes has to be discouraged. In an effort to achieve equity and social justice the marginalised groups need inclusive education. They require education that will liberate them from what Nyirenda (1996) claims to be “naïve acceptance of life and its dehumanizing effects” (p. 10). The notion of social transformation, therefore, is all about the integration of the different sections of the society and the establishment of sustainable democratic culture through engaging both minor and major ethnic groups in nation building. Integration of different ethnic groups requires the citizens’ serious commitment to sustain relations among such groups as Muslims and Christians, indigenes and non-indigenes, and southerners and northerners.

The Nigeria education fact sheet released by the United State Embassy in Nigeria (2012) indicates that “Nigeria has a large number of out-of-school children and young adults with limited literacy and numeracy skills who have little hope of ever joining the formal workforce” (p. 1). A probable solution to this problem may be to involve what Boukary (2014) suggests:

- a. *improved quality of teaching;*
- b. *strengthened curricula for primary and secondary education to include life skills, and civic...education;*
- c. *higher completion rates at all levels of education, (and)*
- d. *strengthened linkages between educational system and labour market demands (p.3).*

Nigeria requires an effective education system to be able to tackle its institutional problems. First, there must be a paradigm shift from an exam-driven approach adopted by the system to skills acquisitions. There may be need to emphasise vocational education in the curriculum as this may assist to stem the tide of the unemployment problem in the country. Second, the country needs education that will enable individuals to be critical in thought, which is education that helps learners to analyse problems and make thoughtful decisions. Individuals with critical thinking ability are more likely to exhibit maturity in handling issues of national interest than those who approach issues ordinarily. Social capital can also be utilised in this age of science when the citizens are reflective in their thoughts.

Conclusion

Nigeria requires an effective system of education with approaches that make it pluralistic, inclusive, just, and transformative (Parajuli, 2014) in order to tackle the problems of suspicion and distrust among the various ethnic groups in the country. At present the system is not making any meaningful impact, hence the need for a reformative approach. First, the destabilising inequality in educational attainment which exists between Southern and Northern Nigeria must be addressed. Second, the vulnerable groups (marginalised and disadvantaged) require access to education in order to be integrated into the mainstream of Nigerian society. Since the greatest challenge confronting the country is its structural defects and institutional decay, a major obstacle behind its oneness, it seems social transformation presents a viable option to adopt. The need for transformation was advocated because the alienated groups must be fully integrated into the society, an effort that must include a sustainable educational experience. Over and above this, suspicion and distrust among the major ethnic groups require a social capital resource, trust, in order to enhance cooperation and unity in the country.

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