Nigerian Curriculum and National Integration: Issues and Challenges

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Author’s contribution

This whole work was carried out by the author AS.

ABSTRACT

This paper reviews and examines causes behind the challenges towards achieving national integration in Nigeria. Today the country is in the grip of various destructive forces that are deteriorating the unity among its citizens such as Boko Haram and ethno-religious crises. This paper aims to examine some of the issues bedeviling Nigerian education and reviews its curriculum content and practices. The findings of the paper show that tangible efforts have not been made to review the curriculum and instill some aspects through which current challenges can be resolved. In the same vein, even the national policy of education armed with its designed need to attain national integration appears to be unsuccessful. Emphasis is given on the need to review the curriculum content with a view to instill some aspect that may likely resolve the current challenges and bring national integration. These include bringing in subjects that teach historical lessons on how Prophet Muhammad and his companions related with Jews in harmonious way. It should be made mandatory that every students must study and obtain at least merit in three major languages spoken in the country (Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo).

Keywords: Education; Nigerian curriculum; ethno-religious crises; national integration; Nigeria.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education serves many purposes in human societies. None of these purposes compares with promoting integration and national unity especially in heterogeneous developing societies. However, for education to serve this purpose especially in the face of modern challenges, two major issues need to be addressed. First, curricula content must be tailored towards appreciating these critical challenges. Second, it should be designed in such a way that citizens who are exposed to behavioral modification under curriculum would become patriotic and committed citizens [1].

For countries like Nigeria that are considered developing, the importance of curricula in promoting national integration and unity is crucial. On one hand, there is a challenge of designing and implementing proactive yet effective curricula that recognize myriad of challenges these countries face including need for promoting integration and unity among their people. On the other hand, there is always a concern that curricula design in these countries no matter how altruistic the motive ends up clogged with poor implementation mechanism. As a result, the purpose which it is intended to serve at conception becomes defeated. Whatever the case may be, one thing that is not in contention is that curriculum forms the bedrock of modern educational system. In addition, it is understood that education is critical to sustainable development and progress of modern nation states.

The objectives this paper seeks to achieve are simple and straightforward. It reviews the development and changes of curricula in Nigerian educational system especially at all levels against the backdrop of its relevance in promoting national integration and unity. Specifically, the paper is interested in investigating and showing whether the curricula as it stands today, is designed to help and contain the multiple challenges to national unity that Nigeria currently faces. To ease the presentation, this paper is divided into six sections. Section one, reviews the theoretical arguments underpinning the issues associated with the concepts of curriculum in education. Section two, reviews the Nigerian educational system with emphasis on those goals and objectives, which its education system is designed to achieve. Section three, reviews the nature of curriculum content in Nigeria and shows how it fails to match with the objectives of the Nigerian education in light with contemporary challenges. Subsequent sections provide some concrete examples of how this mismatch between educational curricula and objectives is affecting Nigeria’s national integration and unity. The final section concludes the paper with some important observations and recommendations.

2. EDUCATION AND CURRICULUM: A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

Education progresses through involvement and interaction of person with the real world. This process begins right from birth, continuously influencing his perception, his consciousness, and forming his attitude and behavior. This process goes on by improving his ideas, and giving him a clear outlook in life. In other words, through this interaction with his environment, an individual is socialized in his society [2]. Moreover, energizing the child's power in accordance with the demands of social situations in which he lives, leads to the realization of true education. Likewise, through the demands of social situation such as peer group, an individual is encouraged to act as a member of a society, and to visualize himself from the perspective of the group he belongs. More so, an individual judges and gives meaning to his action in social terms, through what others say on his activities [3].
Curriculum can be described as the educational experiences designed purposely for certain students within a specific time in order to accomplish the set objectives [4]. Additionally, curriculum is defined as planned learning activities for students, ran and monitored by schools in order to achieve its educational goals [5]. Curriculum is fundamental to education. It serves as an instrument for guided instruction [6]. Curriculum entails organized and intended interactions, which involve instructors, learners, and learning resources in the school or in other appropriate instructional settings. Thus, curriculum is a means through which societal values are translated by the educational institutions into tangible and memorable attestation. Curriculum portrays and transmits to the learners what the society considers worthwhile. Every society has its own peculiar conception of how its curriculum should be designed and the goals it should aimed at [7]. Curriculum combines objectives, subject matter, learning activities and evaluation techniques as components that together serve as contributors of educational value. It serves a guide for schools to instill in the learners the desired knowledge, skills, attitudes and habits accepted by society. Periodic review of the curriculum to reflect changing realities of the modern world makes it salient to the needs of the society [8].

3. EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

As a developing country, Nigeria's policymakers recognized the imperativeness of education to sustain national development and progress [9]. Education serves as a means through which questions of national unity and integration in the country could be promoted and achieved. Evidence of this could be seen from the objectives and principles, which its education at all levels seeks to achieve. The aim of education in Nigeria is to provide the necessary knowledge, skills, attitude and values to the citizens, so that they can become useful to the society. In addition, this will enable them to participate toward the development of their communities. Specifically, these objectives can be broadly presented as assimilation of national consciousness and national unity; an acclimatization of the right values and attitudes for the survival of an individual and the Nigerian society; and equipping citizens with the awareness of world in general [10].

The Nigerian National Policy on Education [11], states that the purpose of education in Nigeria is to train the citizens towards the achievement of national development. In other words, education is seen by Nigerian policymakers as a means of attaining national objectives. These objectives as highlighted in the Nigeria's national development plan includes: free and democratic society; a just and egalitarian society; a united, strong and self-reliant nation; a great and dynamic economy; and a land of opportunities for all citizens. In order to determine whether the existing curriculum is designed to achieve these objectives, there is the need to examine the contents of the curricula itself.

4. THE CURRICULUM CONTENT IN NIGERIA

The half of the nineteenth century has been marked with two major trends which are very essential while discussing educational development in Nigeria. First, the arrival of the Christian missionaries in some areas that later became Nigeria around 1842, resulted in the development of the first rudiments of formal curriculum in the country. The Christian missionaries had full control over all issues related to formulating and designing school curriculum [12]. Additionally, for the missionaries, the major concern was to train the community in four R's (writing, reading, arithmetic and religion-Christianity) in the primary
schools established at Abeokuta, Badagry, and Lagos, described as first places where missionaries' schools were opened [13].

Secondly, schools were established to provide religious education (Christianity) to the converts which was one of the missionaries' major task. Some of those subjects offered by the missionaries such as English, History, Geography, Gymnastics, Logic, Drawing, and Geology at secondary level clearly had wider purpose beyond theological instruction [14]. Both the designed curriculum and subjects been taught in the time of Christian missionaries were drawn from British Grammar schools, and this however, made Nigerian citizens passed through the curriculum that was irrelevant to them and limited the full development of the student’s potentials [15].

Ibiwumi [16], in an effort to describe weakness of the curriculum designed by the missionaries stated that “the future needs of the learners were not adequately taken care of, because the type of curriculum implementation was white-collar jobs-oriented. The training in agriculture and other manual trades which could gear the trainees towards self-employment was neither a part nor an integral part of the early curriculum”. Furthermore, curriculum in Nigeria experienced many changes before the country became independent but most importantly when it gained independence in 1st October, 1960, the problems of curriculum became so conspicuous to the extent that the federal government after independence established a committee to study the challenges of education in a post-colonial Nigeria. In its report, the committee made the following recommendations:

a) Provide a compulsory projects in secondary schools;
b) Introduce various kinds of secondary school curricular that entails vocational, commercial and agricultural subjects;
c) Modify and strengthen both in-service and pre-service of teachers training; and
d) Introduce teacher’s advanced college and associate it with universities [17].

These recommendations were made against the understanding that the type of education imposed in Nigeria corresponded with the needs of the British colonizers. Therefore, concern for designing a new curricular was quite significant for the country. Consistent with the character of most newly decolonized countries in Africa and Asia, Nigeria sought to adopt a robust system of education that goes in line with its aspirations as an industrialized and prosperous country. The curriculum was initially designed as 7-5-4, which translated into 7 years in primary school, 5 years in secondary school, and 4 years in A-level [18].

A National conference on curriculum development was held in 1969 which served as the basis for drafting the National Policy on Education of 1977 in Nigeria. This new policy suggested a 6-3-3-4 system of education which started in 1983. It means 6 years in primary school, 3 years in junior secondary (JSS), and 3 years in senior secondary level (SSS) and finally 4 years at tertiary institution. Thus, the aim of the curriculum was to provide a sustainable literacy and numeracy as well as efficient communication between citizens. It comprised the fundamental needs of learners such as moral and religious knowledge, science, mathematics and skills for craft. This system was also designed to overcome the physical inequity in the colonial system of education [19]. In addition, the Universal Primary Education (UPE) adopted after the formulation of 1977 policy on education was modified in 1999. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) which recommended 9-years in primary school for lifelong learning, involving equipping learners with writing, reading, and numeracy skills was adopted as a replacement for UPE. Further, this system seeks for curriculum development, supervision of instruction and improvement of classroom teaching [20].
As described earlier, the educational system introduced by colonial masters was seen as alien and irrelevant to the values and culture of Nigerians. Likewise, the current curriculum of Nigerian education runs counter to the aspirations and values of Nigerian citizens. This might be related to its colonial and Christian missionaries’ legacies of promoting their values and religion. Despite various efforts made by successive administrations since independence to change the direction and goal of education in Nigeria, the colonial imprimatur of the education remained apparent till today [21].

As a result of this, some of the fundamentals objectives which education in Nigeria was intended to achieve such as promoting unity, national integration and development, remained to date highly unrealized. The hindrances to national integration today are more colossal to the extent that socio-religious cleavages and other forms of divisive tendencies are threatening the unity of the country. Some justifications [22, 23] pointed out that the attempts on the curricular adjustments in the past have failed to reflect the values of Nigerians, especially those related to living in harmony and social integration.

It is possible to trace this problem of national cohesion to the apparent failure of education and its curricula contents to serve those objectives, which were believed to be important in a heterogeneous country like Nigeria. In the preceding paragraphs, this paper has already shown those objectives which Nigerian government considered critical and which it felt should be achieved through designing robust curricula of education. It is interesting to note that failure translate this vision into reality significantly contributed in the emergence of various social cleavages in the country. Some of these social cleavages such as Boko Haram and ethno-religious crises have overtime become serious challenges and manifestations of educational failure to serve as the building block for national integration in Nigeria as a heterogeneous country. In the following pages, this article focuses on some of the more pronounced among these challenges such as Boko Haram and ethno-religious crises in Jos, Plateau state. In looking at these issues, the article seeks to show that these are related to the failure of curricula in promoting national integration in Nigeria.

5. CRISES IN NIGERIA: THREATS TO NATIONAL INTEGRATION

Nigeria is a country with many ethnics and religious groups. Presently, it faces numerous crises that are weakening its economy and stability. Such crises create division between tribes and religious groups and undermine unity among the citizens of the country. These crises such as Boko haram, religious conflicts especially among the adherents of two dominant religions: Christianity and Islam, is occasioned due to the failure of Nigeria’s education system to serve as the glue that cements the various ethnic groups into a single cohesive entity. In the succeeding paragraphs, this paper closely looks at some of the challenges and how they are fuelled by the colossal failure of education.

6. BOKO HARAM

Around 2002, a group of young Muslim adherents from the North-eastern states of Borno and Yobe in Nigeria declared that Nigerian state as founded on the basis of unbelief or Kufr, a reason which justify in their view, a Jihad or Holy war against it. With the name Ahlul Sunna Lidda'awatiwal Jihad, this group’s abhorrence to anything Western, including culture, value, and educational system earned them the pejorative name of Boko Haram which in Hausa Language roughly translates to Western and formal education is impermissible [24].
The central ideology of this group which centers on imposing of sharia system in Nigeria could be said to have been nurtured and sustained by years of alienation and the dysfunctional nature of the Nigeria’s educational system [25].

When discussing Boko Haram as a manifestation of failure of education in Nigeria, few pertinent observations can be made. First, these types of groups sprang up in the country more or less as a reaction to the failure of the formal education system together with its curricula content to address the manifold of challenges associated with developing societies. These include unity among citizens, patriotism, seeing education as holistic endeavor which covers Western and religious instruction, and equips the curricular with related values that are socially relevant. As a result, disillusionment and alienation that were generated by ignorance and unemployment become entrenched through decadent educational system which is incapable of equipping the citizens with the much needed skills and values to live comfortably in their society.

The second pertinent observation is that curricular content of the Nigerian educational system was not designed with a view of producing a self-reliant citizen. Because of this, it fails consistently to match the expectations of people in offering them the appropriate skills required to meet modern challenges. Therefore, if it had been conceived with a strategic vision for the future development of Nigeria, it is quite possible to argue that groups such as Boko Haram would not have been hatched.

7. ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CRISES

Recently, there has been an increase of conflict among adherents of the two dominant religions in Nigeria, Christianity and Islam. This violence often has ethno sectional dimension as well [26]. The 2011 presidential election manifested these cleavages most vividly. Goodluck Jonathan, a southern Christian, and Muhammad Buhari, a northern Muslim were the two prominent contestants for the April 2011 presidential election. President Goodluck won the election, and his victory resulted in violence in several cities in northern parts of Nigeria.

Similarly, an incessant ethno-religious crises in Plateau state is another example. It is believed that the main cause is the existing dichotomy between the settlers and natives which creates contestation over land ownership. The politicians from the local Christian community in the state restrained the Hausa people in Plateau state from obtaining access to the state resources [27]. These crises exhibit animosity and division among the Nigerian citizens. It cannot be denied on how Nigerian curricula fail to foster integration among the citizens. In the Nigerian context, people never see themselves as those belonging to a single country, but rather they define themselves as people fit in only to one part of the country.

8. CONCLUSION

This paper examines the concept of education and curriculum and talks about the aim, and objectives of education in Nigeria with a view of showing how education in Nigeria fails to achieve its defined objectives. The paper reviews the curriculum content and practice in Nigeria, as well as its shortcomings. In addition, the paper considers the state of instability, and disunity among Nigerians such as ethno-religious crises that engulf it. It is important for the Nigerian government to objectively reevaluate its curriculum since it can be said to be meaningful only if it reflects the culture, values, aspiration, and current challenges of the
society. Specifically, government should develop a new strategic plan for periodically reviewing the curriculum content, so that new issues and challenges are anticipated and addressed promptly. For example, due to the recent crisis of Boko Haram, the curriculum content ought to be reviewed to accommodate some aspects that talk about the importance of seeking knowledge from both Qur’an and Bible respectively.

Unity and peace can be achieved in Nigeria through adjusting the curricula at all the educational levels (primary, secondary, tertiary and university) to bring in subjects that teach historical lessons on how Prophet Muhammad and his companions related with Jews in a harmonious way in Medina. In addition, creating such core subjects will in return gives some idea to the students that religions share things in common and have the same root. Attention should also be given on the ideas and values which teachers convey to their students. Some teachers are part of the entities that trigger religious crises based on the wrong interpretation of religion they pass to the students.

It should be mandatory that any student must study and obtain merit at senior secondary school final examination in three major languages (Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo) in Nigeria. Consequently, this could foster a sense of unity among the citizens. Although, in the present time it is optional for secondary students at junior level to choose anyone of these three major languages to study. Hence, they normally choose their mother tongue.

More than any other consideration, emphasis should be directed towards designing a rather comprehensive civic education in the country. Citizenship education is a means to eradicate problems threatening cohesion of human societies [28]. It also “provides a positive framework for collective civic identity. As such, it can be a stabilizing factor in societies suffering from violent, conflict and its aftermath” such as Nigeria [29].

**COMPETING INTERESTS**

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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