

PRIORITIZING CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION FOR NATIONAL COHESION AND DEVELOPMENT

Bam Clement Liambee

Department of Social Studies
College of Education, Katsina Ala
meetbam@gmail.com
08132292119

Adamgbe Kenneth Aondohemba

Department of Social Studies
College of Education, Katsina Ala
adamgbekenneth@gmail.com
08160053792

&

Tyokever Eugene Amaakaven

Department of Social Studies
College of Education, Katsina Ala.
etyokever@yahoo.com
07031835344

Abstract

Nigeria is confronted with legion of socio-political and economic challenges; ranging from arson, vandalism, examination/electoral malpractices, insecurity, disunity, decayed infrastructure to bad leadership. Many shower blames on colonial masters for laying a shaky foundation for the nation. Others accuse Nigerian leaders for not sailing the vessel according to the rule. Little or no attention is directed at citizenship awareness yet they are the owners of the state and have both crucial constitutional and moral responsibilities capable of changing the narrative if given the desired and needful awareness. To this end, this article titled prioritization of citizenship education for national cohesion and development is undertaken with the purpose of finding out: the relationship between informed citizens and the national cohesion on one hand and, on the other to find out the relationship between citizens awareness and national development. On methodology, the article adopted qualitative approach relying on secondary sources. The article reveals that

citizenship education has significant positive impact on national cohesion and development. It then recommends that; Citizenship education should not only be included in the school curriculum but must be made compulsory at all levels and for all categories of students and must be seen to be taught. Again, National orientation agency should organize for massive citizenship awareness for the teeming out of school population via village assemblies, town hall meetings and public lectures. Also, Social Studies specialists should be used in teaching and training of would be teachers of citizenship education. Besides, the family should be repositioned for inculcation of fundamental values and attitudes in the child. Finally, the mass media (private and public owned) should be motivated to key into citizenship education.

Keywords: Citizenship Education, National Cohesion and Development.

Introduction

What is today called Nigeria is a child of British colonial activities. Hitherto, there were various nations that inhabited this geographical location with diversities in cultural traits of language, religion, marriage, government etc. In spite of this, British who were only interested in their exploitative and imperialist trade still lump them together as one nation state (Azide 2000). Worse still, the colonialists were not interested in the integration of the heterogeneous population. For instance (they divided the country into regions) members of the Nigerian elite class between 1950s and 1960s had their education and world outlook molded by their regional institutions thereby having little or no understanding of their neighboring regions (Gambari, 2008). Apart from not allowing Christian missionary activities (which acted as purveyors of western education) in the North, Southerners resident in the North at that time were allocated separate quarters called Sabon-Gari. This was same with strangers in the East living in separate quarters called Abakpa (Nnoli, 1978). Again, between 1914 and 1947 the North and Southern parts of the country operated separate legislative houses. In other words, there was no political integration for 43 years.

Thus, during the struggle for decolonization of Nigeria, the leaders became grafted onto their regions without a central rallying figure like Kwame Nkuruma of Ghana and Nelson Mandela of South Africa. This phenomenon occasioned regional, ethnic, religious, sectional and clannish politics in Nigeria up to post-colonial days. Nigeria citizens who are supposed to pay allegiance to the central government rather cling themselves to their various Federating units and support sectional leaders who do not even mean well for them. To this end, merit is

sacrificed at the altar of mediocrity making the centre to become very weak hence citizens lack the knowledge about their constitutional and moral responsibilities that will (usher in cohesion and development), make the central government strong and enhance their welfare.

Concept of Citizenship

Citizenship is derived from the word citizen. A citizen is a person who is a legal member of a country where he/she enjoys full rights and is ready to put his/her life at stake in defense of the country when need arises. Citizenship on the other hand is explained as the legal relationship that exist between a citizen and his/her country. (Mezieobi, 1994). This relationship connotes that:

- (a) There is a legal relationship existing between a citizen and his/her government
- (b) There is a procedure for becoming a citizen of a given sovereign state.
- (c) A sovereign state recognizes those it grants citizenship status to become full members of the country.
- (d) Government/the sovereign state protects the rights and ensures overall welfare of the citizens
- (e) Citizens appreciate the role of the government by diligently performing the prescribed duties and obligations to the state (Mezieobi, 1994).

According to the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, citizenship status in Nigeria can be acquired by birth, registration and nationalization.

(a) Citizenship by Birth

Here, the constitution recognizes anybody born in Nigeria and or of Nigerian parentage as a citizen by birth. Again, one born outside the country but his/her parents or grandparents are citizens of Nigeria, is also accepted as a citizen of Nigeria by birth. Citizenship by birth also accommodates a person who has one of his/ her parents as a non Nigerian as citizen.

(b) Citizenship by Registration

It covers or recognizes; a non Nigeria woman married to Nigerian citizen, an adult born outside Nigeria by Nigerian (citizen) grandparents who demonstrates the desire to be of good character and domicile in Nigeria and a non Nigerian citizen adopted by a Nigerian citizen are all registered as citizens.

(c) Citizenship by Naturalization

Here, a person of full age (that is eighteen years and above) who was hitherto neither a citizen of Nigeria by birth nor registration can apply for citizenship by naturalization on the ground that he/she meets certain constitutional requirements: The person must live up to 15 years in Nigeria. Where it is broken, his/she must live up to 20 years out of which his /her total residence should aggregate at least 15 years and must have been seen to have assimilated to Nigerian ways of life. Finally, the person must also be made to take an oath of allegiance to Nigeria as prescribed by the constitution.

Types of Citizens

Countries around the world (Nigeria inclusive) are made up of citizens and the strength or weakness of a country is dependent on the quality of citizens who are members of it. There are two types of citizens; good or active citizens, bad citizens or passive citizens. These types of citizens are also found in all strata of the society and in all fields of human endeavor (Asiegbu, 1990).

(a) The Good or Active Citizen

This is one whose life is a good example to his fellow citizens. He does not merely know what is expected of him by the society in which he lives but as far as he can, practices in his life what he knows to be the right. He is honest, strive towards developing his country, he is punctual and industrious. As leader, a good citizen makes sure that he is committed to welfare of his followers and provides them with adequate social services. Apart from preaching peace always, he protects lives and property of his followers.

(b) The Bad or Passive Citizen

This crop of citizens are larger in number than the good and active citizens. This is especially true of Nigeria where many display care free attitudes to actions of government, do not contest or register for election nor protest against rigging or inflation of census figures, or siphoning of public resources etc. To him, anything goes and whatever happens to the society is not his problem.

Where the population of passive and bad citizens is higher than that of the good or active citizens, the work of the good citizen becomes more difficult hence they have to carry extra burden handed down to him by the passive citizen. Unfortunately, it is the passive citizens who grumble most at wrong deeds in the society occasioned by bad citizen without putting in any efforts to write the wrongs. In fact, the passive citizens heap useless burden on his society by neglecting their duties and responsibilities. This explains while it is argued that the kind of leadership in a country at a particular point in time is the sample, miniature

or microcosm of the larger society (Igbo, 2003). So, to work or change bad leadership and socio-economic ills in a country, the citizens must take responsibility and this can only be achieved when citizenship education is prioritized.

Concept of Citizenship Education

Uche (1980) views citizenship education as the preparation of the child for social responsibilities. To Morrisett (1981), citizenship education is the conscious effort to educate the youths about certain subject areas, mostly with strong value emphasis. Obiadi (1998) summed it up by defining citizenship education as the type of education which teachers teach what it entails to be a good citizen of a country, his responsibilities in the society, his limitations and the fundamental rights he supposed to enjoy as enshrined in the constitution. It is about enabling people to make their own decisions and to take responsibilities for their own lives and their community. It also teaches why he/she is very important to the country and to love his country man so that unity, progress and stability will be attained.

Concept of National Cohesion

National cohesion is a process and an outcome of instilling and enabling all citizens in the country to have a sense as well as a feeling that they are members of the same country, community and institution. These members engage in common enterprise and face shared challenges. It means conscious desire for diverse group of people to belong together and affirm the conditions of mutual dependence. It entails constructing integrated citizenry with the sense of belonging amongst members of different groups and regions of the country (Odogbor, 2015).

The term national cohesion therefore covers national unity, national integration, social solidarity and nation building. To attain these, citizens must be conscious and rational as to why they should unite and sustain the unity, a task that can be accomplished through citizenship education.

Concept of National Development

National development implies not only national economic growth such as increase in output or production but also the qualitative and quantitative changes in the country's social economic, cultural and political sectors. It also covers improvements in institutions and levels of living, as well as excitement of quest for modernization, recognition and reorientation of entire economic, political and social systems (Ikwumelu, 2019).

National development been a holistic endeavor requires citizens that are focused, industrious united, patriotic and with the spirit of national consciousness. Nigeria experience has shown that Nigerians lack the desired citizenship education

capable of causing unity and development. This explains why most Nigerians prefer voting candidates from their states of origin, not minding their credentials. Such unpatriotic acts produce sectional, nepotistic and corrupt leaders without ideas to bring about development.

Nigeria Cohesion and National Development Challenges

Nigeria has been yearning for unity since independence in vain. Omosore (2018) attributed unity challenges in Nigeria to historical legacy bequeathed by colonialists, religious/language differences, ethnicity and bad governance. In her effort to bring about cohesion, government has adopted various integrative measures since 1914 up to post independence era and they include.

- (a) The amalgamation
- (b) Nigerianization policy
- (c) National youth service corps scheme
- (d) Unity schools
- (e) Federal character commission
- (f) National language policy
- (g) Adoption of Federation
- (h) New Federal capital territory
- (i) Creation of local and state governments (Ojo, 2009)

Although much efforts and resources have been sunk by government in ensuring social cohesion, little has been achieved in this direction hence the citizens are not educated well on the rationale behind unity. This explains why Maduabuchi (2000) argues that development can only be attained and sustain in Nigeria if development of human beings (that is the citizens) is given desired priority. For instance, Gambari (2008) identifies leadership that emerged in Nigeria with poor recruitment process occasional by ignorance of citizens as the cog in the wheel of Nigeria cohesion. According to him, they include leaders who:

- a) See themselves as champions of only some sections in the population
- b) Do not understand economic and political problems of the country, not to talk of finding solutions to them
- c) One interested in silencing their opponents than in pursuing justice
- d) Preach one thing and does another
- e) Place themselves above the law of the country

- f) Have no sense of tomorrow other than that of their private accounts.

Worse still, majority of the citizen do not know that they have the right and duty of bringing erring leaders to account through constructive criticism and ballot. Rather, they gullibly run sycophancy around them as if they are heroes and owners of the state (Azide, 2000). Apart from clinging loyalty to their states of origin, most Nigerians wait for National allocations (accruing from crude oil source) for sharing. Natural gift of crude which suppose to be a blessing is now seen by many as a curse hence it is killing spirit of industry in Nigerians. To worsen the matter, Nigerians refuse to patronize home made goods and services (even government departments and agencies) a phenomenon that is fast weakening the economy (Bam, 2014).

Prioritizing Citizenship Education

Priority means something that is very important and must be dealt with before other things; that is something that one does or deals with first because it is more important than others (Oxford Advance Learners Dictionary, 2014). In the circles of Nigeria nation-state, the components of what make up Nigeria are the government, citizens and the territory. The three are all very important but the citizens are top most important. This is because the citizens (that is the population) are the owners of the state and without them the state ceases to exist. Again, it is from the citizens that government is formed. Or better still, it is the citizens that produce government of the day. (Ughaerumba, 2012). Unfortunately, the citizens who are the owners of the state and producers of the government of the day are twisted about with trivial reasons of ethnicity, sectionalism and religion leaving the leaders in affluence and the citizens in object poverty. Until and unless the citizens are given the desired information, the statuesque will remain. This explains why the article is not only apt but timely.

Although government performs enormous task of protecting lives and property of citizens, it is the citizens that produce the government and supposedly spelt out its dos and don'ts via constitution of the state. It is in this wise that government is expected to give account of its stewardship to the citizens hence they are public servants or servants of citizens or the state. Invariably, the citizens are prominent as far as state matters are concern. Issues concerning them have to be prioritized. Unfortunately, the reverse is the case in Nigeria where leaders corner laws to their advantage thereby turning the owners of state into slaves and servants of the state into kings and queens; a situation that precipitates all sorts of social, political and economic ills that make development to elude Nigeria.

Objectives of Citizenship Education

Ikwumelu (2019) identifies main objectives of citizenship education as enumerated thus:

- a. To enable the students take democratic actions in large and small groups
- b. To enable the students diagnose and improve group performance.
- c. To make the students understand the development of democratic society
- d. To make the learners appreciate the value of liberty, government by consent and representation and responsibility for the welfare of all members of the society.
- e. To help the learners to acquire skills and techniques of analyzing social actions and forces.
- f. To help in providing stability in society by emphasizing the quality and importance of freedom, justice, equality and co-existence.

For a country to attain the above laudable objectives, it has to inculcate positive values and attitudes into the child (Bam, 2015). This serves as formidable foundation for later successes in the teaching and learning of citizenship education. Values of emphasis are: honesty, cleanliness and liveliness, concern for others, industry, justice and integrity, discipline and courage, chastity and self control. The family as an agent of socialization performs this onerous task of laying foundation for citizenship education (Denga, 2005).

The school builds on the foundation laid by the family in teaching more values and attitudes, fundamental rights of the child, his duties as a citizen and obligation he/she owns the country. All these are complemented by the church, society at large and the mass media (Odogbor, 2015). These efforts inculcate spirit of nationalism and patriotism into the child which go a long way in promoting national cohesion and development. A trip to objectives of citizenship education reveals inclusion of vital components; teaching of values, attitudes, the constitution, their duties and obligations which put produce a good and active citizen.

Fundamental Human Rights

For any citizen to function effectively, he/she must be educated about his/her rights. Fundamental human rights are inalienable rights that all human beings possess irrespective of their status, race, creed, nationality or origin. These rights are inalienable hence they cannot be taken away from anyone in so far as he/she is a human person (Ughaerumba, 2012). The constitution of the Federal

Republic of Nigeria 1999 as amended in 2011 has a list of fundamental human rights enshrined in it from section 33 to section 43 as presented below:

- a. Right to life
- b. Right to dignity of human person
- c. Right to fair hearing
- d. Right to personal liberty
- e. Right to private and family life
- f. Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion
- g. Right to freedom of expression and the press
- h. Right to peaceful assembly and association
- i. Right to freedom of movement
- j. Right to freedom of discrimination
- k. Right to acquire and own immovable property anywhere in Nigeria.

Responsibilities of Citizens

Responsibility entails duties or obligation of citizens to obey the law or constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It is argued that responsibility has legal and moral dimensions. Under legal responsibility, a citizen is both morally and legally bound to perform certain duties for the state, and failure to perform such duties attract sanctions. Under moral responsibility a citizen is expected to employ his/her civic actions to contribute to nation building (Ugherumba, 2012).

Duties of Citizens

- a) Obedience to the law
- b) Payment of taxes
- c) Defense of father land
- d) Giving evidence in court of law

Obligation of Citizens

- a) To respect symbols of national unity such as naira, national flag and anthem plus coat of arms.
- b) To respect constituted authority and institutions
- c) To vote and be voted for during elections

- d) To offer constructive criticism
- e) To be whistle blower in checking of criminality
- f) Protect public property etc (Akude, 1989).

A cursory survey of contents of citizenship education reveals that a child who receives citizenship education will not only be ingrained in values of industry and integrity but will also have spirit of nationalism and patriotism which are necessary ingredients required for national cohesion and development (Ikwumelu, 2019).

Spirit of Nationalism

Shamija (2005) views nationalism as the development of national consciousness, the totality of the cultural, historical linguistic, psychological and social forces that pull a people together with a sense of belonging and sharing common values. This development tends to lead to the political belief that this national community of people and interest should have their own political order, independent from and equal to all other political communities in the world.

The Nigeria experience in the arena of national consciousness is worrisome. There is an overwhelming attachment of citizens to their families, age grades, clans, ethnic groups, religions and or states of origins as against the central government. This is vindicated in many ways; people in Nigeria prefer to vote for someone from their ethnic group, community or religion not minding the qualities of the would-be leader. Worse still, individuals and even government agencies patronize foreign goods and services and jettison home-made commodities (Azide, 2000). For meaningful national cohesion and development to strive, citizens must have national consciousness.

Patriotism

This connotes the love and pride which one has for his/her country that makes him/her to always defend it and contribute to its stability, peace and progress (Asiegbu, 1990). For Nigeria to develop therefore, citizens have to be inculcated with values that will evoke not only spirit of nationalism but patriotism. Citizens have to fully identify with Nigeria (central government) as patriots. This implies sacrificing personal interests for common good or for the betterment of the state. True patriotism can manifest in citizens' swift response to payment of taxes, obedience to the laws of the land, defending territorial integrity of the country when need arise, uniting with others to defend fundamental human rights, participating in elections according to electoral laws etc. In fact, spirit of true patriotism can be seen in Nigerians during football matches involving the national team against a foreign team. Millions of Nigerians follow the game on radio and

television. They talk and feel as if they are all members of one big family. They all celebrate with one another when the team wins. Everyone becomes unhappy when the match is lost. Indeed if this kind of spirit is translated to other facets of the nation, Nigeria will become great.

Conclusion

For enhanced development to be achieved in Nigeria there is the need for the citizens to be given mass citizenship education that will raise their awareness in terms of their rights as well as their duties and obligations. Such education can help citizens to produce the right leadership, check erring leaders and be patriotic and nationalistic in thoughts and deeds and above all be industrious for economic and social stability and sustainability. This is a task that must be done hence Nigeria citizens have no other country than Nigeria; and can neither collapse her population into any of the neighboring countries nor their resources contain the population of Nigeria.

Suggestions

In order to achieve national cohesion and development, the article recommended the following:

1. Citizenship education should be made compulsory for all categories of students and at all levels and must be seen to be taught. Besides, National Orientation Agency should organize for mass citizenship education for the teeming out of school population via town hall meetings, village assemblies and public lectures. The public and private media should be motivated by spirited individuals and government to key into mass citizenship education.
2. The family institution should be protected, supported and motivated to perform its traditional mandate of inculcating fundamental values and attitudes into the child. These could be by way of providing housing, medical facilities and enactment of laws that will ensure family stability.
3. Engagement of Social Studies specialists in handling citizenship education in and outside Social Studies classes and to handle training of teachers and instructors of citizenship education will be of great help. This is because Social Studies specialists are ingrained in foundation and philosophy of Social Studies which among others employ interdisciplinary approach in solving social issues. This approach brings concepts, methods and variety of forms of knowledge, subject disciplines and thought process to bear on the problem of disintegration.

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