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RELIGION, NATION-BUILDING AND NATIONAL SECURITY: THE ROLE OF EFFECTIVE PRIMARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

AKOWE JOEL
Department of Public Administration,
Kogi State Polytechnic, Lokoja, Kogi State,Nigeria

&

MAKOJI STEPHEN
Department of Public Administration,
Federal Polytechnic Idah, Kogi State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The preamble of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria indicates that Nigerians have resolved to live in unity, freedom, equality and justice under one God. While this shows the God-centredness of the Nigerian project, it also underscores the fact that even though the belief in a deity is a personal choice, monotheistic Deity religion is a national symbol irrespective of any adopted theological expression. Today, not only is Nigeria having National mosque and National Ecumenical centre in the same part of the Federal capital city but has equally accommodated the two religions in the distribution of power and privileges among the adherents of these two faiths in order to give each group, a sense of belonging. This paper showed concern on the growing religion-related violence in Nigeria and their consequences on the socio-economic and political fabrics of the country. Querying gap in early childhood education, the paper recommended policy re-engineering and effective programme of monitoring aimed at strengthening primary education system in Nigeria.

Keywords: Religion, Nation-building, National Security, Role, Primary Education

INTRODUCTION

Religion refers to belief in the existence of a god or gods, especially the belief that they created the universe and gave human beings a spiritual nature which continues to exist after the death of the body (Hornby 1995). While this definition substantially reflected the thinking of the animistic tradition of origin religion, it underscores the fundamental component of the religious beliefs which is the life here after. Whether from animistic or naturalistic perspective, the core purpose of religion is to fill both the intellectual and emotional gaps of human beings who have come to be accepted as both spiritual and emotional. Thus, while the emphasis of religion is belief and worship of a supreme being, it equally emphasized on the maintenance of peaceful relationship among men.

Emphasizing on the importance of religion, Durkheim in Haralambos (2002) contended that social life is impossible without the shared values and moral beliefs which form the collective conscience. In their absence, he agreed, there would be no social orders, social control, social solidarity or co-operation. Talcott Parson in Haralambos (2003) also held the view that religious beliefs provide guidelines for human action and standards against which man's conduct can be evaluated.

From these functional perspectives, since religion provides basis for expression of common beliefs values and virtues among its adherents, it unites such group within the context of the right attitudes towards the sacred as well as social duties and obligations. Thus the entire purpose of religion is to create positive vertical relationship with the Supreme Being and horizontal relationship with the fellow men.

In Christian faith, for instance, Durkheim in Haralambos (2002) explained the Deuteronomic "thou shall not kill" to comprise how to drive a car, how to settle an argument and how to deal with the sufferings of the weak. To him, this particular portion of the Decalogue (Ten Commandments) prohibits murder, manslaughter, suicide and euthanasia. A look at the Ten Commandments would also reveal that

only three (thou shall love the lord thy God with all they heart and thy soul, thou shall not call the name of the lord thy God in vain and thou shall keep the Sabbat day holy) were the only commandments relating to the Supreme Being. The rest seven were designed to regulate the horizontal relationships among men.

In Luke 10:25-37, the entire Christian faith was summed up in "love the lord your God with all your heart, might, and soul and your neighbour as yourself". Neighbour here was defined as anyone in need (Jakob and Bergh of 2010). In the Holy Qur'an Surah 107 (Almaun) was dedicated to "neighbourly assistance". Here, the Holy book described those who repulse the orphans (with hardness)(2), encouraged not the feeding of the indigents (3) and refuse to supply neighbourly needs(7) as those who deny the judgment to come.

In Surah 98 (Albayyinah), the clear evidence, the Holy Book in Aya (5) commissioned those who have faith and do righteous deeds, to, in addition to offering Him sincere devotion, through regular prayers and practice of charity. According to Abubakre in Mala (1988), Sharia as deduced from Qur'an, the Sunnah and Ijma, refers to the obligatory way of life of all Moslem faithful which include peaceful co-existence within the Moslem Ummah and the non-Moslems. To him, the term non-Moslems refer to people of two categories:

(i) Those who follow revealed religions recognized by Islam (Ahludh – Jhimmah – people of covenant). In legal usage, it means people whose faith, life, property and other forms of freedom are guaranteed for safety by Moslems acting according to Sharia. Examples here are Christians and Judaists.

(ii) Those who are not recognized as possessing revealed religion worthy of protection. The law in this case is that the Moslems acting under the stipulations of Sharia should avoid them. If however one of them seeks protection from a Moslem who is able, the injunction of Sharia is that he should not only be made comfortable but also be guarded to his place of safety. These include traditional religion believers.

NATIONAL SECURITY

Though the responsibility of state security has survived the entire phases of the development of Nation-state, the complex needs of the citizens of modern states have taken the frontiers of security beyond physical security architecture and ornamentation.

To Lippma in Onudugo, Amujirin and Nwuba (2013), a nation is secured to the extent that it is not in position to lose its core values, life, property and liberty. National core values referred to here may included National self-sustenance, self esteem and freedom which when translated, may mean the entire gamut of what makes the citizen feel confident and proud to belong to that given organized political community.

Gwarzo (1998) puts this more clearly by defining national security as freedom from hunger or from threat to a nation's ability to protect and defend itself, promote its cherished values and interests and enhance the well-being of its people. Summing up the National security objectives, Obasanjo in Attah (2006) hinted that:

It shall be to strengthen the Federal Republic of Nigeria; to advance her interests and objectives; to contain instability; control crime, eliminate corruption, enhance genuine development, progress and growth; improve the welfare and well-being and quality of life of the citizenry.

From the above premises, National security has a substantial genetic relationship with development as the entire purpose is to eliminate the fears of either real or imagined dangers or threats from the psyche of the citizenry. National security is also one characteristic of an active state as opposed to a failing or failed one.

RELIGIOUS CRISES IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS ON NATIONAL SECURITY

The worries of this paper are that, religion which is supposed to provide the impetus for social solidarity, norms for common protection, peaceful co-existence, discipline and faithful service, etc, has become a channel/cover for heinous crimes and corresponding security threats in Nigeria. For instance, between 1980 and 1982, it was Maintasine riots; in 1987, it was Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) crisis;

in 1991, it was Kano for Christ Crusade crisis; in 2007, it was Zango – Kataf crisis and from 2003 till date, it has been Book Haram. In all these crises, many lives have been lost; properties worth trillions of Naira have been lost; millions of people have been displace, education, health and other social facilities have been distorted; poverty and unemployment have been on the increase, etc.

Beside the huge material and psychological damages described above, Onududo, Amujiri and Nwuba (2013) contended that this has threatened the very fabrics of the Nigerian nationhood as reflected in the new particularistic form of political consciences and identity.

The second worry of this paper is the growing involvement of children in this violence. In their vulnerability, some have been kidnapped while others have been innocently indoctrinated (or radicalized) at the detriment of their own lives and that of the nation. Today, child bombing is a common phenomenon in Nigeria.

The third worry of this paper is the neglect of primary education despite its pivotal role in the nation building process. Available evidences have shown that this level of education has suffered more invasions of unqualified teachers, poor government regulation and motivation. In recent times, primary school had experienced so many strikes which had interrupted effective teaching and learning (Nwaogu 1990).

Parents too have continued to fail in their responsibilities to these pupils. While they pay little attention to their kids' total development as a result of urban pressures, some have failed in other responsibilities such as prompt payment of their school fees, showing them love and teaching them the virtues of peaceful co-existence (Cornell, 1989). The society has, through physical and electronic harshness, exposed the children to violence, lack of self esteem, misinformation and abuse. Children have by these, been prone to wrong perception of citizenship (Dunst Trivette and Deal, 1988).

NATION AND NATION-BUILDING

Though, most developed economies such as Britain, USA, Sweden and Germany, etc, had preceded their statehood with nation-hood in that, in their respective territories, their common objective characteristics as a people were first defined before their territories emerged as states, most third world countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Somalia, the reverse was the case as most of these states emerged as products of arbitrary colonial interests and activities. Characteristically these territories were carved out by their colonial masters without regards to objective attributes of their populations. According to Martinnussein (1990), these territories comprised either a multitude of nations or only a part of a nation with corresponding weak foundation for any national consciousness that could survive the test of time.

To Hornby (1995), a nation refers to a large community of people sharing a common history, culture and language and living in a particular territory under one government. From this definition, not only are the natural and systematic sources of nationhood are accommodated but the dimensions of territoriality and governance were also added as essential components of the objective imperatives.

From the above definitions a nation is characterized by: A group of people living in a particular territory under a particular government. To sustain this relationship, other imperatives include a shared purpose/s, culture and tradition (including symbols language) and identity deliberately evolved, and sustained over time.

Building on the other hand refers to forming or constructing of structure through integration of different materials or parts (Hornby 1995). In any building project, not only are the component parts assembled but they are properly fitted into each other in accordance with the predetermined concept. Thus, Nation-building, according to Martinnussein (1997), is creating a political community and promoting the citizen's transfer of loyalty from their primary collectivities to the larger or formal political system. As an integration of the entire population of a state into a cohesive unit, Nation-Building is conscious trust building through good governance. While the state and its machinery are for this purpose engineered to be responsible and responsive, the citizens are in turn, expected to be supportive, law abiding and hard working. By implication, nation-building involves making a system out of parts, homogeneity out of heterogeneity and unity out of diversity.

According to this scholar, it is for the purpose of nation-building that state building is imperative. Thus, within the nation building project, the process of creating bureaucracies and other structures commence to penetrate and integrate the society so as to ensure that the required support for political system is generated and sustained. From this perspective, Hettne (1990) refers to Nation-Building as a unique project of using the population in a specific territory as building materials. He

therefore identified the characteristics components of nation-building as including: Establishment of exclusive political/military control over the territory; sufficient defense of this territory against possible claims from outside; creation of material welfare and political legitimacy within this territory; Consolidation of communal and collective solidarity in the population; creation of national feelings sufficiently strong and wide spread to unite the vast majority of the population within the political community and the development of national symbols which are capable of attracting common identity, acceptability and loyalty.

While the nation has a choice of what material to use in building its foundation, given Gold, Silver precious stone, wood, hay and straw (I Cor. 3:10-12), a nation that desires a successful nation building must thus ensure that her development programmes are not only peace-intensive or basic needs-driven, but must also be anchored on self-reliance and sustainability.

CHILD AND CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

A child According to Hornby (1995) refers to a young person from birth to the age of full physical development. Put more clearly, Oladele (1998), defined a child as a young person between age 2 and 11. To him, early childhood spanned between 2-6 years while late child hood covered the period between 6 and 11 years and within this period, the child has learnt all he/she needs to know in life. Therefore, for every foundation of knowledge, skills and attitudes for individual and national development or nation-building, this period is very critical to its acquisition.

According to Buckley and Caple (2000), education refers to a planned and systematic effort to modify or develop knowledge, skill and attitude through learning experience, to achieve effective performance in an activity or range of activities. Its purpose, according to these scholars, is to enable an individual to acquire abilities to perform adequately and efficiently a given task. By this definition, education is design for *specific*, *purpose,* one of which is to minimize *individual differences* or intolerance and provide fairly *predictable responses* in a given situation or set of complexities.

Plato in Schofied (1995) posited that education should be given early and consistently while the *mind* is less *congested* and *elastic*. He thus defined the concept as a *'suitable habit* given to the *first instinct* of *virtue* in children when pleasure and pains are implanted in a non-rational soul'. The purpose, according to him is to enable the child (trainee) *'do what he ought to do, hate what he ought to hate and love what he ought to love'*.

From the fore-going, the right skill knowledge and attitude for nation-building is best acquired as a child through the right channel, the right persons and in the right environment. Accordingly, even though all the levels of education remain vital to the individual and societal transformation, pre-primary and primary education has often been described as the foundation upon which other levels of learning are balanced.

According to the National Policy on Education (NPE) (1998), within the main five national goals (of a free and democratic society, a just and egalitarian society; a united, strong and self-reliant nation; a great and dynamic economy and a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens), the purpose of pre-primary education (3-5 years) is to lay foundation for primary education by preparing the child to appreciate and explore the rudiments of his/her basic physical, social and intellectual environments. These include the inculcation of social norms, exploration of nature, development of a sense of co-operation and team spirit and learning of good habits, etc. The medium of instruction at this stage is expected to be the *mother tongue* (for the early construction of local self-esteem).

The provision of the same document on primary education is mind blowing. According to sections of the document, primary education (6-11 years) constitute the foundation upon which the success or otherwise of the entire education system is guaranteed. Accordingly, its goals include the following among others.

(a)   To inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy and ability to communicate effectively;

(b)   To lay a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking;

(c)   To give citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society;

(d)   To mould character and develop sound attitude and morals in the child;

(e)   To develop in the child the ability to adapt to his changing environment.

A look at the above would sufficiently suggest that primary education occupies a pride of place in the nation-building project of Nigeria and must therefore be taken seriously. Worthy of note too is that

the process (methodology) is highly demonstrative while the experience acquired at this point is live-long in terms of productivity and dignity of labour; citizenship and political/civil duties; as well as governance and security.

Re-echoing the imperatives of primary level of education, not only did it occupy the second position of the eight-goal agenda of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on the eve of the current century but Labo-popoola, Bello and Atanda (2009) pointed out the rationale behind its re-enactment in the National Policy on Education 2004 section 3. According to this document, the first nine years of formal education was fundamental or basic to foundation-laying for nation building and national development. The policy therefore stipulated that Education at this level shall be free, and compulsory.

Labo-popoola, Bello and Atanda (2009), further identified the three core components of Universal Basic Education (UBE) - (i) Universal (ii) Basic (iii) Education - which connote the following: it is universal because it was for everyone, irrespective of tribe, culture, race or class; basic because it is essential or fundamental (to be given or received); and education because it is designed to inculcate the right knowledge, skills and attitudes into the learners for positive contributions to the development of the society.

Linked to the above are the objectives of UBE stressed in the UBEC's annual report of 2005 which include the following among others: unfettered access to 9 years of formal basic education; provision of free universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school-going age; drastic reduction of the incidences of drop-out from the formal school system through improved relevance, quality and efficiency; and the acquisition of appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning.

The above position was further strengthened by the enactment of the Universal Basic Education and other related matters Act 2004 as well as the establishment of the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC). The three sources of fund for the programme include: the Federal Government Grant of not less than 2% of its consolidated revenue fund; funds or contributions in the form of Federal Guaranteed credits and Local or International donor grants. To further ensure the commitment of the State Government, the Act further stipulated that the State Government can only benefit from the Federal Government *bloc* grant meant for the implementation of the UBE projects if it can contribute at least 50% of the total cost of the project (Labo-popoola, Bello and Atanda 2009).

Other provisions of the Act meant to ensure successful realization of the objectives of the UBE programme include: the prescription of the sanctions for parents who fail to send their children and wards to school; the provision of free text books in core subjects; and the abolition of tuition fee at the primary school and the Junior Secondary School levels.

To sum up the corollary of the Basic Education Polity as discussed above, the following may be deduced.

(i)   Every government in Nigeria is under compulsory obligation to provide free, compulsory and Universal Basic Education to every child of Primary and Junior Secondary School age;

(ii)   All parents are under compulsory obligation to ensure that their children or wards attend and complete their primary education up to Junior Secondary Schools level.

(iii)   All critical stake-holders (Government, Teachers, Parents, Community/ Faith organizations were put under legal or moral obligations to ensure effective delivery of Basic Education objectives.

Despite these plausible paper-works on Primary Education, events in recent past have grossly contradicted these goals as declared. This would be apt when the challenges of primary education in Nigeria are examined.

CHALLENGES OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Olarewaju and Funsho (2009) in Labo Popoola Bello and Atanda (2009) have pointed out fundamental challenges to the development of functional primary education in Nigeria. These include:

(i)   **Lack of proper planning**: Nigeria has continued to contend with the monster of dearth of accurate and reliable statistical data as a result of faulty census exercises in Nigeria. This has impeded on accurate determination of the target size (pupils), and their corresponding needs projection. Consequently, planned personnel, structures

(e.g. class rooms and extra-curricular facilities) and equipment (e.g. laboratories, libraries and teaching aids, etc), are more often than not, grossly inadequate.

(ii)   **Lack of adequate funding**: Beside the fact that Federal allocations to education has consistently fallen below the UNESCO bench mark over the years, that of primary education seem to be acutely lower. In addition to the slimness of the public funding of education, interventions from donor agencies are equally slow and haphazard as a result of the inconsistencies of the various levels of government to redeem their counterpart funding obligations. These have affected both the adequacy and timely availability of funds for primary education projects and programmes, including prompt payment of teachers' salaries and incentives.

(iii)   **Process Corruption**: This includes all forms of process abuses in primary education programmes, projects, activities and administration. For instance, projects are awarded at prohibitive costs to incompetent contractors for private gains, unqualified teachers are recruited and posted on the basis "who knows who" and monitoring by ministries of education and other relevant agencies have often been compromised to protect vested interests, etc. All these have weakened both the structural and content capacities of primary education system to deliver the required knowledge and skills.

(iv) **Drop out Syndrome**: Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) report of 2003 starkly indicated that only 60.7% of the children of primary school age were actually in school. Out of this total, 63.7% were male while the female constituted only 36.3%. This report cited in Olarewaju and Funso in Labo-popoola, Bello and Atanda (2009), further revealed that while the Net Attendance Rate (NAR) of the urban sector stood at 69.5%, those of the rural sector stood at 30.5%. Just as the above out of school figure is alarming, the actual measurement of those who drop out of school was more disturbing. For instance, within the same period, these scholars reported that only 25.8 million out of 42.1 million children below the age of 14 who were supposed to be in school were actually in school. Reasons for these leakages include parental poverty and ignorance, conflicts and (child-hood) diseases and incessant strikes in public schools, etc.

(v)   **Incessant Industrial Crises in Public Primary School**: These include long-strikes occasioned by teachers' motivation expectancy failures in which many parents have been forced to prefer private schools options. The danger here is that most private primary schools are owned and managed by non-governmental agencies, proprietors and entrepreneurs whose primary philosophies are sometimes less liberal and less civic. This is worsened by the weaknesses in the monitoring mechanisms of government as observed earlier in this segment.

RECOMMENDATIONS
The following recommendations are made:
   (i)   Enforcement of free and compulsory primary education should be taken seriously in terms of curriculum development, infrastructural develop0ment and personnel motivation.
   (ii)   Funding of primary education should be taken more seriously by government and donor agencies in order to sharpen the degree of responsiveness of the relevant agencies to the demands of primary education.
   (iii) School inspection and monitoring should be made more effective to ensure compliance with the official curricular.
   (iv)   Leaders of the various religions should be re-oriented to discourage radical elements through effective monitoring of preaching and teachings.
   (v)   Emphasis of primary school curriculum on religious and civic education should be on the achievement of affective domain rather than the present emphasis on cognitive domain.
   (vi)   Parents should intensify effort to teach their children the right civic and religious responsibilities and also monitor their children's behaviours and who they relate with.

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(vii) The media should moderate what they report, how they report and when they report so as to avoid their information coming in contact with those that are not psychologically prepared for them.

(viii) The Nigerian armed forces and security agencies should be educated, trained and armed to prevent, apprehend and persecute religious criminals in order to reduce incentives for the crimes.

(ix) The criminal justice system should be empowered with adequate judicial infrastructure to guarantee swift, severe and accurate award of liabilities to religious offenders.

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