

Education and Political Restructure in Nigeria

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Received: September 21, 2012

Accepted: November 2, 2012

Online Published: January 16, 2013

doi:10.5539/jel.v2n1p171

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/jel.v2n1p171>

Abstract

To say that education is a potent factor in any political restructuring is an undisputable fact. For a meaningful political development to take place in any nation, especially like Nigeria. The place of education is never in doubt to influence positively those in the position of authority to ascertain what are needed to put in place for effective administration and good governance. Education as a matter of fact in this sense is not just what one obtains in the institutions of learning, but it deals with all round development which makes one to contribute meaningfully to the development of himself, his family, his society and the entire nation. The national policy on education titled the philosophy of Nigeria Education made observations that since the national policy is geared towards achieving that part of its national objectives that can be achieved using education as a tool, no policy on education can be formulated without first identifying the whole philosophy and objectives of the nation. It is on this note that this paper examines “Education and Political restructure” as the parameter not only for political and social stability in Nigeria but equally for national development.

Keywords: education, value, leadership, political scene and political restructure

1. Introduction

The Nigerian nation has had a chequered history in terms of political development since she attained political independence half a century ago. Expectations are high at this stage and age of her nationhood, Nigeria should not be a paper-tigger giant of Africa, but an economic, political, stable, dynamic and development-driven nation. Contrary to expectations, her experiences so far have been quite traumatic, excruciating and challenging; and riddled with coups detat and counter coups, a civil war, annulment of the freest and and fairest elections, social and economic strangulating policies and bad leadership, endemic corruption and grinding poverty, acute unemployment, religious intolerance, hostage taking, militancy and terrorist attacks on innocent citizens. The litany of the prevailing social malaise is interminable (Nwafor, 2011).

There is no doubt that Nigeria seem to have not been having it good since the end of the civil war of 1967—1970. The country has moved from one problem to the other given room to the fear that it may eventually crumble and cease to exist. Military politics in Nigeria began shortly after the end of the civil war. The excuse for military incursion into Nigeria’s political arena was tied to General Yakubu Gowon’s unwillingness to vacate the seat of government after his promise to return the nation to civil rule. Aboluwodi (2011) maintained that since the first putsch after the end of the civil war it has been a harvest of military administration. Thus the botched electoral process which would have ushered in a civil administration in 1993 was still an attempt to maintain military relevance in Nigeria political landscape. The confusions that followed the failed electoral process gave birth to a civilian administration in 1999, clearly dictated by the military whims.

Indeed, these political problems and many more have not only impacted negatively on Nigeria’s developmental strides, but have also dented the image of Nigeria abroad. Hence, her citizens are subjected to thorough scrutinizing, humiliating and embarrassing experience outside the shores of Nigeria. For these reasons, there is the urgent need for a radical political change in all spehes of our national life. In fact, a need for political reconstruction is inevitable at this critical stage of Nigeria’s development. The present educational system in Nigeria seems to be far cry when placed side by side with what is required to achieve viable political and

economical stability. Hence, there is a need for the restructuring of the system to meet the current global drive for political sustainability. The only weapon for this assignment is functional Education.

2. Education, Values and Leadership in Nigeria

Dewey (1916) defined education as the continuous reconstruction or reorganisation of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases the ability to direct the course of subsequent experiences: since knowledge comes through the processing of experience by intelligence using the problem-solving method, the aim of education is therefore the development of learners' ability to deal with future problem, that is the development of his intelligence to solve problems (Ayeni, 2011). Education is seeing as the totality of experience in response to nature and environment. In Nigeria for example, there exist three parallel system of education, namely the indigenous, islamic and the western type. All these supposed to target the development of the child intelligence towards problem-solving. O'Connor (1957) was of the opinion that the educational system of any society is a more or less elaborate social mechanism desired to bring about in an individual skills and attitudes that are judged to be useful and desirable in the society.

Education is often and justifiably for that matter, regarded as instrument par excellence for the perpetuation of the value system. But beyond the instrumentality role, value is intrinsically and inseparably embedded in education. For example, to educate is to improve or reform or reconstruct, each of which is a value-laden term. As educators, our responsibility for value education is quite fundamental to political and national reconstruction. Going by the words of Akinpelu (2005) that the school remains paradoxically the only hope of steady and systematic initiation of the youths into the value system of their society. There are other agents of value education, but each of them has become incapacitated for one reason or another. The home, for instance which is the prime and supposedly the natural agent for teaching values has succumbed to persistent economic assaults and poverty as engineered by poor governance and leadership. Consequently, many homes have lost their moral influence and replaced it with materialism and rat race for world affairs. Many religious bodies also have concentrated so much on restoring doctrinal perspectives that they forget their roles as agents of moral education. Instead, they become more interested in their therapeutic activities. Consequently extreme fundamentalism or outright religious fanaticism has not only become the order of the day, but has become dangerous source of national insecurity. Community is virtually replacing morality and patriotism with pure profit, irrespective of how it comes.

Suffice to say that good leadership is particularly important as a source of value inspiration for the citizens. Thus, leaders are the custodians of a nations ideas of the belief it cherishes of its permanent hopes, of the faith which makes a nation out of a mere aggregation of individuals. A careful examination of the attitude and behaviour of the leaders of post independent Nigeria shows that many of them were not sustainable sources of hope for the citizens. Rather they were pre-occupied by the pursuit of selfish personal goals at the expense of broader national interest or need. In other words, Nigerian leaders were instrumental leaders or what David Apter cited by Dike (2005) called "consumatory leaders".

The endemic nature of lack of good leadership in Nigeria has made many concerned Nigerian to continue to ask rhetorically: where are our leaders leading us to and "to whom can we look for the direction we need in respect of the actualisation of the much touted political structure in Nigeria". To many, reviving the political system for the benefit of the generality of the people appears hopeless and possibly unreliable.

3. The Nigerian Political Scene

The issue of ethnic politics started with the 1964 elections in Nigeria when Nnamdi Azikwe, an Igbo man through his party NCNC's alliance with another party, UPGA won the election into Western Nigeria's house as Premier, but was denied of occupying the position because the environment where this happened was predominantly Yoruba (Omotola, 2009). The subsequent developments led to series of crises which eventually ushered in the first military coup and counter-coup of 1967 (see Atofarati, 1992). Ethnic consciousness became intensified with the death of Major General Aguiyi Ironsi. The military administration of Gowon rode into limelight through an appeal to national sentiment that saw the Northern elements leading the nation, with the claim that they were championing the corporate interest of Nigeria. The North was favoured in everything, including developmental projects, giving room for Kano State to have 44 local governmentns while Lagos State has 20 even though the two states have nearly the same population. Some of these awkward practices (the killing of Ken Saro Wiwa and the eight Ogoni activists) later fuelled the spate of ethnic groupings in Nigeria, leading to the emergence of such groups as Odua People's Congress, Igbo Youth Council, Arewa People's Congress, Bakassi Boys, Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta and others. Thus in his submission, Kwaja (2012) contended that "the post-colonial Nigerian state has become so entangled in ethnic and religious issues to the

extent that its neutrality has become suspect’.

Different challenges in the entire political and economic landscape in Nigeria began to rear their heads during the military era shortly after Aguiyi Ironsi was accused of introducing unitary system into the nation’s political field. Ironically, the succeeding military civilian administrations faked a federal system while in practice they actually adopted unitary system. The unitary structure is reflected in the agitations that have come to accompany different policies of governments in the past and the present. Gambo alluded to this notion, though in a reference to Osaghae’s (2005) work where the latter has aptly explained that the clamour for true federalism and a shift from accommodating nationalism to self determined nationalism has become the bane of Nigerian development. In this regard, at the core of the crises of Nigerian federalism, is the acute poverty of consensus on how the federal polity should be structured, power defined, contestation for power organised, resources generated, right protected, mode of cohabitation defined and the larger democratic constitution articulated and compacted.

Whereas, for Eresia-Eke & Ebiye (2010) “federalism as a political philosophy aims to create harmony from intrinsic or inherent political, social and economic asymmetry vis-a-vis ethnic heterogeneity.” In this scene, a federal system by its structure would have articulated these important issues, but because Nigeria is said to be an “indivisible entity” nobody wants to discuss the issues for fear that he/she may be accused of being an enemy of the state. The result is that the political spectrum has become so widen to the extent that it has been able to accommodate some aggrieved individuals and groups at the detriment of the Nigeria’s political fortune and have now empowered these individuals to raise fundamental questions concerning the basis for the Nigerian state. This undoubtedly poses a lot of challenges to Education to tackle.

4. The Role of Education in Political Restructure

Efforts at re-ordering or restructuring Nigerian political system would be futile and of no effect if education, in all its ramifications is excluded. The undeniable fact is that no nation ever made it mark in the world map without education as the fulcrum on which every other developmental activities rest. Political restructure without education is like a mansion without a good foundation. In other words, education should be a catalyst for any political change, which should involve active participation of everybody.

The Nigerian situation is not in any way far from crisis: a situation of social insecurity, engendered by youth restiveness, political unrest, bad leadership, high rate of unemployment among the others. To redress this situation requires a serious and radical review of the entire education sector, if radical and sustainable changes should be attained in our political system. In this case, the educator should perform a dual role, as educator and as political activist. As an educator, he must be committed enough to act upon what he teaches in the classroom. This, the educator can do by anchoring his teaching or some principles of educational restructure such as: “what we want to see in the learner is pursuit of knowledge and not knowledge in pursuit of the learner” (Mieghan, 2011). This means that political restructure of the various facets of the Nigerian society could occur not only through the school but with it.

Any engineering programme for the Nigerian society must of necessity has education as its core. Effective political restructure of the society depends to a large extent on the quality of education given to the citizens, who would be the political engineers. In order words, the quality and quantity of the human resources produced by the reformed education system could enable the society to face the tasks ahead and to cope with changes which may occur in the future, especially in a more complex society. Education in this content therefore should serve as a tool for immediate and continuous changes in society.

Equally important is the fact that promotion of good community relationship is essential in the attempt to maximise teaching and learning, and it presupposes the organisation and administration of public relations programmes outside the school, part of which is undoubtedly political programmes. One of the sensitive areas that should receive adequate attention in this regard is the public behaviour of members of the school community itself through education. The success of the school unquestionably depends mainly on how members of the school conduct themselves in line with the norms and aspirations of the society. For example, every parent concerned about the welfare of his children undoubtedly desires to have his children brought up by a person of excellent character and reputation, who has affection for young people and who is socially, politically and emotionally matured. The community also will respect the school society that reciprocates its respect, and appreciates its values and accomplishments especially in the area of political rejuvenation.

It must be noted that education through schools goes beyond its immediate environment to include the region, the state and even the nation in which the school is located and the world at large. As modern inventions through internet are connecting the world as a global village, than before, a political or social or religious crisis in one part is being felt in other parts. The shrunken nature of the world creates a need for the increased diffusion or

knowledge among its people. Thus, education through schools should provide political experiences that will help the people to understand the problems of world cooperation.

5. Possible Ways of Repositioning Nigerian Education for Political Restructure

Presently, formal education in Nigeria is generally characterised by poor funding, poor teachers welfare, especially at the primary and secondary school levels, poor access to education, inadequate infrastructure among the others. Consequently, many graduates across the board may best be described as certificate graduates without a corresponding productiveness in their field of study (Chukwuebuku 2011). Hence, meaningful and sustainable development has become a mirage in the nation. This has made it difficult to have a meaningful political restructure in Nigeria. If the situation must be corrected with the view to repositioning the nation education for sound political restructure, the following suggestions are highly imperative.

That:

- 1) Leadership will to govern well in political terms has to be constantly demonstrated in all educational institutions and government institutions.
- 2) Leadership, especially political leadership has to be seen not just to be heard--actualising the promises they made to the electorates during campaigns, more importantly, campaign promises on education. Fulfilling such promises will go a long way to turning education around to reposition it for political restructure. This is important because so far, the socio-political scene of Nigeria can be characterised as a scene where fulfilling campaign promises is an abomination; where integrity and honour have been banished and corruption enculturised.
- 3) Political leadership in Nigeria has to patriotically work hard to remove societal contradictions that confront youths and citizens all the time. The contradictions include: seeing the leaders preaching one thing and doing another; seeing the leaders talk against injustice but practising injustice; watching the leaders preach against corruption but practice culture of impurity among the other vices. Leadership resolves to practise what it preaches will be a source of inspiration for youths and citizens to internalize the democratic values of rule of law, respect for self and others, use of nationality and responsibility in thinking and behaviour. That is the only way education can restructure the nation holistically.
- 4) Teacher education at all levels should lead in the way of teaching democratic values in general courses and all specialised courses. Educators should see values as something to be deliberately inculcated in learners consistently. This will make the graduants have the desirable values with which to restructure Nigeria.
- 5) The methodology of teaching values should be given consideration. This will bring in the much needed critical philosophical perspective of teaching values. Such an approach will enhance critical understanding and bring about strong conviction which will empower the learners to practically take part in political restructure.
- 6) Teachers welfare, especially at primary and secondary school levels should be enhanced meaningfully because only a happy teacher can teach well and use education for political restructure in Nigeria.

6. Conclusion

In view of all the political insecurity, instability, corruption and tension of all sorts, there is an urgent need for political restructure in the nation. The principal tool for meaningful change, no doubt, is education. Hence, introduction and subsequent implementation of political restructure ideals will have some implications for the Nigerian education in its role to restructure the nation for effective sustainable development. As a matter of fact, our educational methodologies should evolve a new dimension that will facilitate the integration of Nigerian citizens into the logic of good governance. And also helps both men and women to deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of Nigerian nation. This new dimension in our educational process will inevitably reduce the socio-political dichotomies and disparity presently existing in the nation and contribute to the formation of a new nation and mark the beginning of a new era in Nigerian political history

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