Fostering National Integration in Nigeria: Exploring the Role of Political Science Education

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Abstract: Nigeria has been described by many scholars particularly, the demographers, sociologists and social studies educators as a country with more than three hundred and fifty (350) ethnic nationalities with diverse cultural, linguistic, religious orientations. This multiplicity or heterogeneous character of the Nigerian state tends to frustrate the various attempts at integrating these various entities that constitute the country. However, successive Nigerian regimes have strived to integrate their citizens through such schemes as National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), encouragement of inter-tribal marriages, institutionalization of lingua-franca, emplacement of Federal Character Commission, among others. Notwithstanding these giant strides, integration of various people of Nigeria has proven difficult and perhaps continues to remain a herculean task for the government. This paper, therefore, x-rays the probable nexus between political science education and national integration in Nigeria. It adopted a content-analysis as contained in the national dailies, textbooks, special reports and journal articles to review the extant but relevant literature and consequently, maintains that acquiring adequate knowledge of political science; a sub-field within the umbrella term of social sciences, can be used as a potent yet, veritable tool for national integration in Nigeria. It nevertheless recommends the need to make the subject matter of political science education a compulsion for all students of Nigerian schools, colleges, universities, among other recommendations.

Keywords: National integration, National Unity, Political Science Education, Nigerian state.

Introduction

Nigeria, being a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-lingual state has had to grapple with several challenges that consequently make national integration a requirement for having a relatively peaceful society. No doubt, one of the greatest challenges bedeviling Nigeria has remained persistent threat to national unity as divisive tensions, resource control agitations and call for self-determination, ethnic-based identity, religious cleavages and of recent, the demand for restructuring, have enveloped national consciousness. Some scholars have even concluded in anger that Nigeria does not even exist and this, they alluded, is due to the diversities palpably manifesting between and among the people of Nigeria.

Lewis (1966) once commented that plurality is the principal political problem of most new states created in the 20th century. Noting further, he added, most of these new states envelope people who differ from each other sharply in areas of language, tribe, religion or race; some of these groups live side by side in a long tradition of hostility. His description of the situation of new states as found in Africa, Asia and Latin American countries is not only correct but also a truism that no one should deny. In fact, the Nigerian situation is aggravated by the amalgamation of 1914.

One of such scholars is Ekanola (2006) who submitted that "*Nigeria is never a nation but a mere geographical expression and as such, there are no Nigerians in the same sense as there are "English", Welsh, or "French". Noting further, he added, the cognomen "Nigeria" is merely a distinctive appellation to dichotomize between the people living on the country's soil and those who do not".*

The above perfectly captures the situation of Nigeria most essentially, the pre-independence era. However, there has been not any significant change as the relationship between the people is worse off even immediately after the attainment of independence as each of the ethnic nationalities began to play out ethnic cards. Today, rather than the various ethnic nationalities becoming fully integrated into a formidable and cohesive entity sharing common identity, they now prefer evincing ethnic sentiments, primordial affiliations always waging religious wars and as well, struggling for control of their own resources thus, all efforts at integrating these people of diverse orientations have become problematic (Ekanola, 2006).

Promotion of national integration according to Haloi & Ghimire (2017) remains a very critical requirement of every nation especially in this age of globalization and diversities. It is very essential in countries like Nigeria due to her configuration. National integration in Nigeria as observed by Onyeakazi & Okoroafor (2018) is challenged by the issues of gross intolerance, distrust,

ethnicity, corruption, and most dangerously, insecurity, which seems to be a formidable force undermining national cohesion and unity in high measures. These issues have combined to frustrate the concerted efforts at uniting and integrating the country. Pertinent to say is that, for a state like Nigeria to survive and possibly continue as one indivisible and indissoluble sovereign state as contained in Chapter One of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) , it then follows that there exist ways of harmonizing areas of conflicting interests and integrating the various groups.

However, the pre-occupation of this paper is exploring how Political Science Education can help mitigate the issues and challenges often encountered in the national integration attempts in Nigeria such that the country is able to reinvigorate the spirit of true nationalism and patriotism which are critical to an effective national integration.

Conceptual Clarification

Understanding National Integration

The word integration suggests a process of bringing or linking two or more parts of a system together such that it functions accurately and effectively. It is the process of maintaining the territorial integrity of a state. This suggests that, in a deeply divided society like Nigeria, integration becomes a necessary task that must be implemented for the purpose of securing stability and adaptability within the state. National integration is a multifaceted and multidimensional concept (Aluko & Usman, 2016).

However, the term national integration is analogous to such terms as nation-building, national unity, national cohesion or national question. It denotes reaching agreement among members of a state on the extent of unity they wish to have as well as the political structure and institutions they desire (Edosa, 2014). National integration is the process leading to the unification of society so as to create a harmonious city based on an order jointly embraced by all. It is a situation where members of a community formed a united front to co-habit together peacefully (Oyadiran & Adeshola, 2017).

For Ojo (2009), national integration refers to a process by means of which members of a given social organization develop linkages and locations such that the boundaries of such organization persist over time while the boundaries of subsistent systems become less consequential in governing behaviour of the people. This is to suggest that irrespective of differing qualities that markedly exist between and among the various elements that compose of a given social system, their individual identity paves way for common and a more unifying character.

Coleman & Rosberg (1964:9) conceptualized national integration as the progressive decline in cultural and political tensions and discontinuities particularly with respect to the creation of homogenous political community. In essence, it is a term taken to mean the emergence of peace through breaking down of cultural and regional tensions in the process leading to a strong and virile state. The authors argued further that a state is fully integrated to the extent to which it has an effective control over the use of the means of violence; it has a centre of decision making capable of effecting the allocation resources; and it has a dominant focus of political identification for a large majority of politically aware citizens (Etzioni, 1965 cited in Edosa, 2014).

Haloi & Ghimire (2017) conceptualized national integration as the feeling of togetherness or oneness towards one's own nation regardless of the various differences with respect to religion, culture or race. It proceeds from acting as a strong united nation for securing national goals. It is a term that reduces the incidence of socio-cultural and economic differences on the one hand and strengthens national unity and solidarity, on the other hand. They added that national integration is usually not imposed by the governing authority but an emotional attachment which cannot be achieved by merely enhancing a law.

No doubt Nigeria is a greatly divided country with the attendant ethnic mistrust, suspicion and social antagonism. Whereas, the various strategies emplaced by past and present administrations to control the hatred in Nigeria, have not been effective as there exist monumental crisis bothering on insecurity, sectarian violence, ethnic strife, political instability and of recent, continued demand of the separatist for secession (Edosa, 2014).

National integration connotes a process of holding firmly together the different sentiments or ethnic groups through the bonds of consciously-designed structures, norms and values. It is unification of different peoples in a country such that they see themselves as brothers and sisters devoid of tribal and ethnic sentiments, favouritism, nepotism, religion, among other factors that sharply divide the people (Onebunne & Igwe, 2019).

From the foregoing reviewed literature, it can be extrapolated that national integration is that process consciously designed by a people that aims to promote the habit of living in peace with one another notwithstanding whether or not differences exist between and among the people dwelling and or occupying the same geographical area. What pre-occupies their minds is promoting national agenda while primordial sentiments pave way for national interests.

Conceptual Understanding of Political Science

According to Ibaba (2014), a number of political science scholars have defined the term political science differently. For instance, Varman (1975:1) regards it as science of the state, Laswell, cited in Dahl (1995:3) conceptualised it as the study of the shaping and sharing of power, Argawal (2009) calls it the scientific study of the state and its institutions while Anifowose (2001:6) views it as the systematic study and analysis of politics.

Unlike the traditional political science which analyzed the organs and institutions of the state using descriptive, normative, historical and legalistic approaches as methods of analyzing political issues and events, contemporary academic field of political science deploys scientific methods as its tools of analysis and consequently interrogates and delves into the systematic study of governance, political phenomena in an increasingly objective manner (Roskin, 2023).

To be sure, the contemporary political science is considerably broader and as such, covers the studies of all the societal, cultural, and psychological factors that combine to influence the operation of government. Contemporary political science traces its roots primarily to the 19th century, when the rapid growth of the natural sciences stimulated enthusiasm for the creation of a new social science (Roskin, 2023).

Theoretical Underpinning

This paper deployed systems theory as its theoretical framework. A system is a set of interrelated entities connected to each other either directly or indirectly. The interconnectedness of each part (sub-system) is central to the functionality of the whole system. Systems theory sees society as complex and one whose parts function together with a few to promoting enduring stability and pre-determined goals (Rapopport, 1966; Rapopport, 1968; Oyebode & Obaka, 2022). Systems, according to Fisher (2010) are classified by the nature of relation with their environments and the search for the laws regulating the interest articulation, interest aggregation and political community.

However, Onifade & Imhonopi (2013) have observed that national integration can only be successful when different groups in a political entity achieve integration by means of consensus, social structure and function in society and this, according to them, will inevitably foster social order and cohesion. It means a formal agreement of opinions, views, norms, and in ways of life. For emphasis, national integration is often a goal-directed exercise.

Social structure, in the words of Farkas (2017) betokens the totality of individuals in similar social positions in any given society. It is the specific whole of the social classes comprising the given social groups and typical social relations between them. It furthers expresses the relations and social positions of members in a simplified way detailing the most crucial attributes of these relations and positions. By function, it means the action for which a person is specifically fitted or for which a thing exists (Merriam Webster Dictionary).

The choice of this theory is particularly premised on the belief that national integration is never accidental but a conscious effort deliberately designed by political architects and various groups aimed at ensuring peaceful cohabitation within a given political sphere in spite of the differences between and among the people.

To be sure, Political Science education concerns itself with the description, explanation, analysis of political institutions and processes. Suffice it to say that political science can be likened to an important institution of the state whose functions, workings and operations are very critical to the realization of national integration in any given polity and without which, success at national integration is uncertain.

Indeed, political behaviouralism, an approach to the study of political phenomena, encourages all political scientists and researchers to always conduct their research and investigations into politically inclined phenomena by adopting an eclectic approach by integrating political science with other disciplines as Economics, Geography, History, Social Anthropology, Philosophy, Law, among others. To be sure, using an eclectic approach would avail political science researchers the ample opportunity to have a robust interrogation and consequently understand the nature, causes and probable remedy to a phenomenon being investigated. More importantly, the central role of each sub-system to the whole system will be thoroughly identified and investigated, which, in this instance, is the critical role political science education can play in ensuring national integration in Nigeria.

National Integration Strategies in Nigeria: An Appraisal

It is common knowledge that the Nigerian state is an artificial creation of the whims and caprices of the Europeans and as such, the Nigerian project was never canvassed, negotiated nor tabled for the discussion and input of the diverse people that, ab initio, inhabited separate conglomerates which later became Nigeria. This informed the submission of many scholars to opine that the source of the

multi-dimensional challenges ravaging the contemporary Nigerian state, indeed, emanated from iniquities, an un-demanded amalgamation and the eventual naming of Nigeria by Lord Lugard and his girl friend, Flora Shaw respectively. For the purpose of analysis, a quick review or an appraisal of the various programmes being adopted by successive Nigerian governments is necessary. Relying on the findings of scholars like; (Ojo, 2009, Ugoh & Ukpere, 2012 & Onifade & Imhonopi, 2013), the following have been observed as the national integration strategies in Nigeria;

The British imperialists, on realizing that a form of political system that could satisfy the wishes and aspirations of the diverse elements of Nigeria opted for the adoption of a federal form of government and this according to Jinadu (1984) is to cope with twin but difficult task of maintaining unity while also preserving diversity. Jega (2020) insists that federalism is supposed to be "a model of political accommodation and power sharing, as well as a cure for micro-nationalism". The Nigerian experience has shown that our federal arrangement has not ensured a stable political accommodation and it has not ensured equitable power and resources sharing and that rather than curing micro-nationalism, it has indeed fanned the ember of disunity and ethnic mistrust, among others.

The introduction of National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) through Decree No. 24 of 22 May, 1973 is another important yet, commendable strategy aimed at promoting unity of the people of Nigeria. The scheme was motivated by the need and a burning desire to douse the tension and animosity that led to civil war (1967-1970). To be sure, the scheme mandates every graduate from accredited institutions; universities, polytechnics and colleges to go for a one year mandatory serve to their fatherland immediately after graduation and are expected to be posted to states other than theirs and during which, they may learn to appreciate the cultural heritage of their host communities. Sadly, the worsening security situation in the country is affecting the detribalized posting of the scheme as many parents and public commentators now prefer the posting of prospective corps members to relatively secure and stable states (Onifade & Imhonopi, 2013).

The creation of states is another measure to promote unity in diversity in the Nigeria. The ugly experience of the Nigerian civil war not only necessitated returning the country to a federal form of political arrangement but also required urgent yet pragmatic attempt for state creation. Hence, there were three (3) regions (1960), four (4) regions (1963), twelve (12) states (1967), nineteen (19) states (1976), twenty-one (21) states (1987), thirty (30) states (1991) and the current thirty-six states of Nigerian federation created in 1996. To say the obvious, several minority groups in the country have continued to demand for the creation of more states without due consideration to the financial burden which further states creation will imply for Nigeria (Ota, Ecoma & Wambu, 2020)

Similarly, Land Use Act of 1978 was conceived of as another strategy. The act regulated contemporary land tenure in Nigeria thus, making governors of states responsible for the allocation of land to any interested individuals irrespective of their state of origin, sex or even race. However, the act is still not yielding effective results as it is gradually failing to achieve its purpose as land allocation in the contemporary Nigerian state still follows certain conditions including but not limited to state of origin, ability to buy (Nwocha, 2016).

Unification of National Policy on Tertiary Education, creation of Federal Character Commission, introduction of the Principle of National Integration are other strategies used in curing micro-nationalism and consequently promote national integration in Nigeria.

Examining the Pitfalls against National Integration Efforts in Nigeria

Several authors have written extensively on the challenges and factors militating against past and present attempts at having a united, strong and virile Nigerian state. However, Oyadiran & Adeshola (2016) have noted the following as encumbrance or what can be termed as the clog in the wheel of success of national integration in Nigeria;

Constitutional challenge is one of these several factors that threaten the corporate existence of and a nationally integrated Nigeria. The authors noted that there has never been a particular point in time when the Nigeria people collectively agreed to a constitution under which they would wish to be governed. Ironically, the constitutions adopted in 1960, 1979, 1988 and the operational 1999 constitution were either written in the British parliament or promulgated by the military regime notwithstanding the affirmation in their preambles "we the people" as if they were written by the people of Nigeria to satisfy their collective aspirations. Up until now, the people of Nigeria acting through their representatives in the National Assembly and State Houses of Assembly are yet to evolve a more satisfying constitution.

Resource control agitation- Many Nigerian writers have observed that the lopsidedness of the Nigerian federation has culminated in uneven development of the federating units. Indeed, this has also occasioned the perennial call for secession by different separatist groups such as; Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Movement for the Actualization of Niger-Delta (MASSOB) among others, on the one hand, restructuring of the country wherein the true owners of deposit of minerals as found in the Niger-Delta region would take direct responsibility for their excavation and decide on what programmes or project the proceeds realized

therefrom would be expended on, on the other hand. In essence, the unbridled call for the control of resources also constitutes a bane if not a catalyst in realizing a united Nigerian project.

Activities of ethnic militias- Adefabi and Sheu (2020) have argued that the return of Nigeria to democratic practice particularly in 1999 raised the hopes and aspirations of many Nigerians following a protracted military junta that held sway for more than a decade. In fact, the disgruntled elements in the country held the views that returning the country to democracy signaled an end to long years of neglect and marginalization. Ironically and however, the loud cries of minority groups have continued to be heard. Prominent among these ethnic militias include; MASSOB, MEND, Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), Oduduwa People's Congress (OPC), Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Ohanaeze Ndigbo, among others. While some of these organizations are polite in their agitations, others have taken up arms against the Nigerian state and consequently constitute nuisance and frustrate efforts towards attaining an integrated Nigeria.

Military intervention in politics- Although since the return of the country to democracy in May 1999, military authority have been performing their traditional role of defending the country against both internal and external aggression, however for some time in the history of Nigeria, the military assumed the leadership role of the country, an obvious role abdication or at best a constitutional aberration. It is pertinent and worth noting that laudable programmes were attained during their reigns which include but not limited to; the establishment of National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) e.t.c. The fact still persists that the military regime is less accommodating, anti-democratic and not trained to lead the country (Oyadiran & Adeshola, 2016).

Babatope (2018) noted that of the greatest challenge facing the Nigerian nation is not restructuring, insurgency, corruption, economic recession, youth unemployment or energy crisis but dynamic and visionary leaderships that have remained elusive over the years. In fact, the multi-dimensional crises in which Nigeria is enmeshed are the resultant effects of poor quality of governance and political leadership that has failed to transform the country's national wealth into commonwealth. Leadership is being able to influence the behaviour of others in a group or organization; set goals for the group, formulate paths to ensure the realization of these goals and create some social norm.

Nigeria has been ravaged by political instability leading to policy abandonment. Politicians in Nigeria have often failed to realize the need to be consistent with policies and programmes of government irrespective of the probable change in leadership. Usually, many ongoing projects initiated by the past government are not always completed by the newly emerging leaders for obvious political reasons and until this mindset of Nigeria political and ruling elite changes, succeeding at national integration will continue to remain a mere dream (Oyadiran & Adeshola, 2016).

Justification for Political Science Education as a Tool for Promoting National Integration in Nigeria

Political Science is an academic discipline that concerns itself with a careful analysis and understanding of political theories, political institutions, political organizations, political actors and political activities of the state. It further examines political dynamics, adjustment of individual to the state, international laws, international relations, the concept of power and power relationships among members of a given society (Mohammed, 2013). Political Science Education is a systematic body of knowledge by means of which a study of human behaviour, data gathering and analysis is made probable.

Pacho (2014) observes the following as justification for political science education as a tool for enhancing national integration;

Political Science Education, as observed by Pacho (2014), helps to enhance students understanding of various concepts as sovereignty, state, political obligation and relationship between the state and individual. It further enables the students to objectively and critically scrutinize leaders and political structure. The point here is that political science education is critical to promoting national integration in a country as it helps the people to see the need to co-habit peacefully in society and as well, develops the culture of living in peace in its recipients hence, particular emphasis should be placed on the knowledge of political science.

Political Science Education helps in social transformation. This is possible because a sound knowledge of political science education stimulates in the learners political consciousness thus encouraging their effective participation in matters affecting the state. Therefore, the discipline of political science can help in the social reconstruction by inculcating in learners spirit of togetherness.

The study or knowledge of political science education deals with the study of a system that is interconnected with social, economic and cultural structures. This is to suggest that political science education is relational and as such does not operate in a vacuum. Its focus is usually on the society and the aims and objectives are better achieved by interacting with other institutions of the state.

Similarly, the study of Political Science Education also provides students with the awareness of such political ideologies as nationalism, liberalism, and socialism among others, on the one hand, and enables them to make informed decisions and choices on these ideologies, on the other hand.

Furthermore, Political Science Education helps to enhance in the learners truthfulness and faithfulness by emphasizing the importance of morality in politics. This can help curb the menace of corruption that has eaten very deep into the fabrics national lives of many developing nations like Nigeria. Similarly, it can help mould people's character by inculcating in them a culture of diplomacy.

Conclusion

National integration is very necessary and remains the hallmark, especially, for multi-ethnic states like Nigeria. This is because a multi-ethnic state requires and must be in constant search for very potent integration mechanisms which, in the words of Aluko & Usman (2016), is a time bomb waiting to explode as soon as opportunities present themselves. Therefore, this paper notes violent conflict, religious cleavages, favouritism, ethnic and regional chauvinism, primordial sentiments, tribalism, nepotism, among others, as factors which frequently threaten the corporate existence of the Nigerian state but nevertheless concludes that possession of adequate knowledge of political science education by all will help to better appreciate the need to live in peace and as a nation under the name "Nigeria" as opposed the different nomenclatures being suggested by different ethnic and separatist groups.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this paper, the following were put forward as recommendations;

*That political science education should be introduced into the school curricula across levels of Nigerian educational system and as such, should be made a compulsion for all students.

*That particular emphasis should be placed on the sensitization and awareness of the Nigerian populace with respect to the culture of peace such that they see the need to live peacefully with one another notwithstanding the differences in tongue, religion, and tribe.

*There is need to further depoliticize the recruitment exercise into the teaching profession and more importantly, those teaching government and political science, as it may apply, this will guarantee the employment of persons qualified to teach both by qualifications and passion.

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