The Redemptive Burdens of History and Qualitative Education in Nigeria’s Nation Building

Lucky Nziadam
Department of Educational Foundations, University of Port Harcourt Rivers State

Abstract: This work discussed the redemptive burden of history and qualitative education in the process of Nigeria’s nation-building. The paper advocates for the return of history into the primary and secondary schools in Nigeria. In furtherance of this revered enthusiasm, the paper argues for a compulsory but genuine teaching of the history of the country which should be pursued as a matter of policy by the ministries of education, information and culture and their parastatals. This is necessary to preserve the cultural and intellectual repositories of the country for posterity. As a philosophical paper, the analytical methods were employed with the clarification of some key words. Based on that, some recommendations such as the promotion of history in the schools were made. As a complement, the state government with private sectors initiative should take the ambitious step of setting up mini-museum of history in different local government headquarters, as practiced in more enlightened societies. This will also facilitate education tours and present an ingenious way of being acquainted with history. From the study of history and education some basic virtues such as justice, equality, brotherliness, brother-keeper was recommended for a more stable nation.

Keywords: Nation, History, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Controversies being generated by current debates over the authenticity and veracity of past events in Nigeria tend to confirm the place of history as a veritable subject in Nigerian schools. It is such a pity that millions of Nigerian students have been denied the knowledge of the background and fundamentals of their country, courtesy of an obnoxious policy removing the history subject from school curriculum. Although, it is claimed that the huge misnomer has been corrected on paper through a reversal of policy, it remains to be seen if indeed it has been adequately reflected in practice.

Events in the last few years have shown that lack of a reasonable grasp of history will only widen the gulf of animosity. Furthermore, the fact that history keeps repeating itself in many aspects of Nigerian life, even as public officials and politicians conflate facts of history to manipulate citizens, has thrown the country into a crisis - a sad reflection of the poor state of historical knowledge amongst Nigerians. Indeed, Nigeria’s crisis is now a crisis of incoherence borne out of the failure to know, understand and appreciate history.

Nigeria, during the 2009/2010 academic session, removed the study of history from primary and secondary schools’ curriculum. Official reasons given then were, among others, that students shun the subject; only a few jobs were available for history graduates, and that there is a dearth of history teachers. Lamentably, Nigeria today has no official account of 1967 to 1970 civil war (the guardian newspaper, Sunday May 16, 2021).

Seven years after the government decided that the decision was wrong, and in 2017, the Nigeria Education Research and Development council (NERDC) announced it was set to reintroduce history as a subject, beginning from the 2018/2019 academic session. The NERDC Executive secretary, Prof. Ismail Junaidu, stated that the curriculum would be a stand - alone that would be
taught from primary one to JSS II, after the National Council on Education (NCE) had approved the reintroduction of the subject. In 2018, the Federal Government unveiled a new curriculum for the teaching and learning of the subject in basic schools across the country. The new curriculum was approved at the 63rd meeting of the NCE, which held in Kano in June 2017.

Given the events that played out in the last 40 years, it would seem that the ban placed on the teaching of history in Nigerian schools was calculated, deliberately or otherwise, to impose collective amnesia on the people and mentally dislocate Nigerians. The World Bank could not have meant well for the country when in 1980, it insisted on the restructuring of the educational curriculum on the pretext of the non-viability of history as a course of study. Such decision only prepared the ground for the economic dependence Nigerians have found themselves today.

According to a professor of legal history at the Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) Ile Ife, Akin Alao “A country without a sense of history is a soulless country. It could safely be said that many of the challenges facing state and nation building efforts in Nigeria are a result of the neglect of history, especially, history of inter-group or nationalities before the imposition of colonial rule. It would have been the duty of history as a subject in schools, to bring these truths to young Nigerians to influence their understanding of life and what roles they could play in cementing the relationship among groups”.

Apart from the above declaration, one can assert that history is one of the most important mechanisms for understanding society. Presently, the pace of historical inquiry in the modern world is ever-widening. This is because the pursuit of knowledge implied an endless process of research, analysis, categorization, distinction and elucidation. New grounds should be broken. The need to incorporate major themes and current methodologies has been at the roots of major discourse in historical scholarship in recent times. There is also the clamour for the extension of history from a purely academic agenda to public policy and change in the paradigms, programmes and even activism.

The term history which derived from the Greek word “Historia” means “inquiry” was introduced by Herodotus (born C. 484 BC) is seen in various forms. But Mar Wick in Osuntokun and Oloruntimmehin (2014:297) posits that part of the necessary function of history is that in understanding of the past, it challenges and deflates myths, while at the same time explaining their origins and significances. As a discipline, history is a journey through time and space, and it has the quality of reflecting, moving images from the past - for it is not simply that this past is different for everyone, but that everybody’s memory changes with time, and that these images alter knowledge and ideologies developed as the function of history changes within society.

Defining history is a tripartite or triangular expression which involves using the words “past, present and future” to convey the message of what history is all about. According to Abdulrahman (2019:132), there is no place for the word” present” in whatever that is historical, as the research efforts is with the understanding and conclusion that history is about the past. Although some writers argue that historical issues and events may be contemporary in outlook or manifestation, Abdulrahman (2019:132), `insists that there should be no controversy about it. For him, everything that happened in the life of everyone “today” is past despite that they all happened today. However, everyone can still hold to whatever is their perception of history, hence this paper adopts history as the reconstruction of the past or an unending dialogue between the past and the future (Abdurrahman 2019:133).

It is stating the obvious that Nigeria is still plagued with multifarious problems like the colonial heritage, boundary disputes, urbanization, corruption, national integration, religious bigotry, inept leadership, political victimization, intimidation, assassination, poverty, political instability, among others which make the efforts of nation building a herculean task. It is against this backdrop, that it is germane to create national consciousness in these polities that make up Nigeria. Fortunately, there are various forms or types of history as the past events are always numerous and varied. This is to enable history contribute to nation-building effectively. Again, the scopes of history include political, cultural, environment, colonial, military, church, peace
and conflict, diplomatic, international affairs or international studies, development, local/community, national, to mention but a few. According to N-Ue Bari Samuel (2011:19), these varieties of history which are highly interdependent and interrelated are poised to x-ray the progress, failures and the evolution of development of mankind in a holistic and comprehensive manner.

History as a subject in schools is to bring these truths to young Nigerians to influence their understanding of life and what roles they could play in cementing the relationship among groups. The paradox is that countries that pull the strings at the Brentwood’s institutions did not and have not scrapped history as a subject in the educational curriculum of their countries. In fact, it is even made compulsory at freshman year in their universities. They are all aware like all visionary of powerful civilization, that history is the bedrock of education, without which a country does not and cannot grow. From the family to the state, history has been the great teacher of civilization. Children can hardly learn without history; states cannot make policies without recourse to history. Thus, the claim that history is non-viable to economic development is spurious. (Guardian Sunday May 16, 2021). According to Nwabughuogu in Nue-Bari Samuel (2011:11), history plays its roles in the areas of showcasing people’s identity, conflict resolution, citizen education, intellectual development of the citizens and learners as well as provision of hindsight to policy makers. Others are forecast international values, provision of cultural values, gainful employment, human capacity development, provision of information and research, production of wisdom and individual community consciousness etc.

From the above exposition, it is very obvious that the teaching of Nigerian history is crucial to nation-building. Human society of all kinds developed, developing or under developed, needs history. History is the mirror in which the society sees itself for reappraisal, reexamination and revalidation. From time past, history has been veritable tool for organizing and understanding man’s society the world all over. History is useful in politics, business, agriculture, and other vital sectors of the economy. It is in this regard that Ikime (2006:49) asserts that “True, we need what science and technology cannot provide, on their own, the arguments that I am seeking to put before you is that history has a valid role to play even in a world that science and technology is the “be–all and the end-all.”

As a subject of study and as an intellectual means of political, social and economic development, history is viable, not just for mere certification, but rather on its significance for intellectual rebirth and cultural revival that will enable the country’s educational system to enrich the mind of young Nigerians. Proper historical awareness will enable every Nigerian to know that the country belongs to all, and not just to a set of mischief makers attempting to falsely rewrite history, thus creating room for better understanding of Nigeria.

History is premised also on the need for proper documentation for Nigerians from all walks of life, even if palatable when history is defective in content or form, it can be corrected, as Nigerians have done in the past. Importantly, it will enable people to move on and solve problems with due regard and dignity. Hence, the return of history into the primary and secondary school has expectedly come with some enthusiasm.

Education

Education by its nature is one of the most important instruments for change and development in a society. Education just like history, when developed and used rightly, makes for a better society. On the other hand, when misapplied, enslaves and makes the society miserable and when ignored, destroys the society (Imogie in Ekesionye, 2012:66). Education culminates in the transmission of values generation to generation. Through education, society transmits knowledge and occupational skills including culture, norms and values to its people (Azikwe 1994). Thus Burtch (2006) referred to it as a major force in economic, intellectual, social and cultural empowerment. Its value in bringing about character and attitudinal change ranks as important as its ability to reshape human potentials for desired development.
Hence, the national policy on education (2004) states that education fosters the worth and development of individuals for each individual's sake and for the general development of the society. It equally stated that education is the most important of all fundamental changes in the intellectual and social sphere and any nation that desires sustainable development need to invest much in the education institution. Education holds a unique position in modern societies because many people believe that it benefits society at the same time as meeting the aspiration of the people. This faith in formal education has been strengthened in recent times as advances in knowledge and scientific understanding have been seen to play a decisive role in maintaining material and social progress both within developed and developing countries.

According to Lauder et al (2006:2), it is through science that we develop the technologies intended to improve our material well-being while through the humanities it is hoped that moral and social progress can also be achieved. But what strengthen this faith are the ideas that it is a source of social justice and national efficiency: that education offers students the promise of equality of opportunity irrespective of social background, gender or ethnicity, while providing the economy with an educated workforce.

Education is one of the institutions which people globally have always used or appealed to in their efforts to reposition themselves and address issues in politics, economics, science and technology, social engineering, religion, culture and their general well-being. Success in using education to address all issues brings about transformation and development. Nigeria has made numerous efforts to develop and transform through education. The first indigenous effort in this direction was the 1969 national curriculum conference which worked out modalities for a truly Nigerian curriculum aimed at replacing the British Colonial curriculum for Nigeria which was to solve Nigeria’s national problems. The national curriculum conference of 1969 led to the foundation in 1977 and soon followed the nation-wide Universal Primary Education Scheme of 1976 which was limited to six years of formal primary education.

Built into the National policy on Education and keeping with Nigeria’s faith in education as an instrument for effecting national development and national transformation, it is important to stress here that another name for education is human development. It is capable of developing man who in turn develops the society. It is mere waste of time for leaders (politicians) to carry out physical or structural development in the society without being committed first to human development. It is necessary to recall that the more committed the government is to its policy on education, the better the education system. This also relates to a better society. Unfortunately, the sudden withdrawal of the initial commitment of the federal government to education explains why the five main national goals set by the federal government as the necessary foundation for the national policy on education failed to meet the targets. These include the five national goals such as:

a. a free democratic society.

b. a just and egalitarian society.

c. a united, strong and self-reliant nation

d. a great and dynamic economy, and

e. a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens (FRN 1981:7).

A critical look of the above goal shows that all is not well. How free and democratic is Nigeria today. Or can we say that there is justice and fairness in all major life facets in this country? Is Nigeria truly united, strong and having self-reliant economy? Or can we with certainty say that Nigeria is the land of bright and full of opportunities for all. These issues can only be resolved or redeemed positively through a highly qualitative and dynamic education system which formed the original consciousness of the national policy on education.
Nation building

Building a nation is like nurturing a human being from the state of infancy to the adult stage when the human being becomes a responsible and productive member of his community. The difference is only in degree and scope because the nation is made up of many individual human beings, many races, tribes, cultures and languages, and has a much long and wider life-span. Whereas the life span of the individual human being is numbered in decades, the life span of a stable nation may cover many millennia.

In the early times of recorded human history, there was nothing like nation states as they exist today, different peoples lived in different parts of the world initially as self-sufficient communities who gradually began to interact with one another through trade, commercial and social interchange. Conflicts gradually arose when communities began to compete with one another through trade, trade routes, commerce, farmlands and other good things of life. Many of these communities began to gather either through affinity or by force of arms to form larger and more powerful communities. In this way, the ancient empires were established by the most powerful people at that time. Typical examples include the Egyptian, Sumerian, Persian, Babylonian and Assyrian empires.

The fundamental philosophies and ideas that shape modern thought about the governance of human communities and what we call “nation building” today originated in those early city states, republics and empires, especially those of Egypt, Greece and Rome through eminent philosophers and sages like pharaoh Akhenaton, Solon, Aristotle, Socrates, Plato, Julius Caesar, Augustus Caesar, Marcus Aurelius and others. Fundamentally, nation building has to do with organizing a human community to live together with dignity in peace and in full freedom to develop their highest material and spiritual potentialities, make their contribution to the community and humanity as a whole, live happy and prosperous lives in a sustainable way and then pass on (Ijuwe 2008:5).

Nation building may therefore be viewed as an integrative process in which different personality identities and forces are gradually gathered together, aligned and fuelled to produce a harmonious, productive and radiator unity. It cannot succeed in vacancy of the citizen. Nation building is largely citizenship building. And really, the process starts with those we elect into office…” (This day, the Sunday Newspaper May 16, 2021). In fact, in the vast literature on political development in the third world, nation-building is defined as the process by which the central state creates and nurtures institutions that command the allegiances of all primordial entities within a country – is regarded as a sine qua non for stability and development (Almond & Coleman, 1960, Deutsch, 1961, Apter, 1965, Almond & powell, 1966).

Elements of Nation-Building

True nation building involves many complementary areas of activities and fields of human endeavour in the modern world - a world that is rapidly becoming a global village of inter-relationships and inter dependence. The purpose of all the nation-building activities is to provide a stable and progressive environment in which the people of the nation can flourish, grow and flower to enable the nation become responsible international partner in the task of building a safer, more secure, peaceful and progressive world. All the various aspects of nation-building represent the activities of the seven Rays as they are reflected in all areas of human endeavour: in governance, education, socio-economic development, art, music and culture, science and technology, ethics, and religion, and rule of law and order, all of which are essential and complementary for the enfoldment of planetary consciousness. The challenge of nation-building is to manage all these aspects skillfully, wisely and consistently to ensure that the underlying unity of purpose is progressively realized and achieved.

According to Juwe (2008:10), stakeholders in nation building are noted by their interestedness, the future generation of humanity, the animal, the vegetable and mineral kingdoms and the higher spiritual kingdoms who are the archetypes and custodian of the human race. The task of
nation-building is therefore one of the great responsibility because so many parties are affected by the success or failure of the building process.

The main actors in nation-building include the family circle, that is the “home” where charity is expected to begin, the immediate community, the government of the nation, the educational system and institutions, the established religious institutions who are supposed to be the proponents and progenitors of spiritual ethics, the people themselves through civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations, philanthropist, businessmen, scientists, educators and technocrats, financiers and economists, healthcare workers, musicians and artists etc. each actor is a part of the great network of builders who must play their part diligently, faithfully, selflessly and consistently in order to reach goal-fitness and facilitate true national and human unity progress and the all-round development of life on this planet.

CONCLUSION

In the final analysis, one can see that education and history acts as a store-house for the society’s developmental records. The above submission clearly point to the fact that both education and history deal with the issue of morality. History and education, especially moral education are inseparable. Proper integration and blending of concept of education and history ultimately lead to nation-building. True education has to do with the rounded out development of the individual human being; it should produce enlightenment and a definite expansion of consciousness or opening up of the human mind. These are necessary in bringing about gradual freedom from selfishness and the engendering of greater inclusiveness and openness of mind in the world. Right education is a sine qua non for true nation-building because it brings about true enlightenment and right vision in the individual and in the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In our nation, Nigeria today, majority of the people agree on one thing that our country is sick; that the basic problem of the country is a spiritual one. Nothing seems to work properly and nobody really seems to care enough. Everybody seems to be in hurry and yet progress remains very slow; everybody want to be rich quickly and at all costs, only very few really understand the meaning of service and the need to serve. Many of the office holders use the offices for selfish purposes, exploiting the same community they are paid to serve, there is minimal accountability, and most people who violate the law go without appropriate reprimand or corrective action. Love of money and what money can buy are ruling the nation. This was not so in the beginning of our coming together as a nation. Education if properly organized by those in power can be used for settlement of all these anomalies. The knowledge and skills acquired will definitely produce very sound and good results in terms of quality and discipline.

The government supported by the educated and enlightened people of goodwill and vision in the nation need to champion and sustain effort through good examples, sound policies and best practices and providing enabling environment that is conducive for peace to exist for people to feel more secured in their communities and in the nation.
REFERENCES


7. Alogoa, E.J. (1979).” The python’s Eye: The past in the living Present” inaugural lectures sense No 1, University of Port Harcourt.


