ETHNIC POLITICS: A THREAT TO PEACE AND EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, 
THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

The desire for democracy is of global interest especially to countries struggling to be out of dictatorial regimes. In Nigeria, the reverse is the case, as ethnic politics has resurfaced in the whole country in recent years, manifesting into negative inter-ethnic conflicts that have posed a threat to peace and educational development as a result of rivalry amongst over 250 ethnic groups in the country. This paper looks at Ethnic politics in Nigeria, its threat to peace and educational development, with particular reference to the Nigerian experience, government’s efforts to maintain peace and unity. The paper draws a conclusion and makes recommendations that the teaching of peace and conflict as a “General Studies course” with a view of making educational institutions a location for the promotion of peace, understanding and tolerance, should be a course taught to all students in their first and second year. This will give them a grounded knowledge on how to handle all forms of conflicts they might encounter with others. There should be a judicious use of ethnic balancing in the provision of socio-economic and political opportunities for all citizens. Countries facing similar crises as identified in Nigeria should use this opportunity to draw lessons from the “Asian Tigers” economies of Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia, who have pursued, their industrialization, educational and technological development etc individually.

Introduction

Since Nigerian independence in 1960, ethnicity has played a role and is still playing latent roles in Nigerian politics, the country has experienced ethnic conflicts of enormous proportions in places like Kaduna, Taraba, Kano, Delta, Benue, Plateau States and so forth which in many instances lead to closure of educational institutions for a period of time displacing a number of students and inhabitants of the states affected. Some of these crises like Kafanchan in 1987, when the Muslim Students Society attacked students of the college of Education, this spread to Kaduna, Katsina, and etcetera; where churches were burnt, and properties destroyed. A similar incidence occurred in Almadu Bello University (ABU) Zaria in 1988, when Muslim students attacked Christian students over victory of a Christian student in the students’ union elections. About 107 students were injured, and after the closure of the university many students why travelling back to their homes were attacked and killed. In 2002, at Federal College of Education Zaria violent Muslim youth from Tudun Wada, attacked the girl’s hostel at night, killed, maimed, injured, raped and traumatized the female Students. As a sovereign state, efforts have been made towards entrenching a stable democratic system to provide peaceful co-existence; unfortunately this dream seems unrealizable owing to some challenging factors. As Otite (1990) observed, ethnic virus has been one of the most important causes of social crises and political instability in Nigeria and ethnicity has been perceived in general as a major obstacle to the overall political, economic and educational development of the country. Indeed, it is no longer new that one of the most effective gimmicks that have worked very well for Nigerian politicians is the use of ethnicity and negative application of religion.
have been raised and fears expressed about the future of the nation’s fifty one (51) years after independence.

Ethnic crises have become a permanent feature in Nigeria’s socio-political life since independence and the most worrisome aspect of these crises is its effects especially on the educational sector, and the fastest way to economic development in the modern world today is education. Without quality education, a country cannot become competitive, modern economies are branding themselves as competitive in order to attract enterprise and not to scare people away from them. The selling point of the most competitive economies in the world, from the United States to the Scandinavian countries, from Ireland to Botswana, is the availability of high quality human capital for service industries of the 21st century. In spite of all these, the allegiance of a large portion of Nigerians to a particular ethnic group still surpasses their loyalty to the national community (Aghalino, 1993). Consequently, the achievement of a greater degree of inter-ethnic accommodation and national integration constitutes some of the most critical problems facing Nigeria as a country. In the words of Achebe (1983: 5), nothing in Nigeria’s political history captures her problem of national integration more graphically than the fortune of the word “Tribe” in her vocabulary. Tribe has been accepted at one time as a friend, rejected as an enemy at another and finally smuggled in through the back door as compliance.

Nigeria is a pluralistic society in terms of its multi-ethnic and multi-religious nature. The country has more than 250 ethnic groups (Suberu, 1998. p. 277) and two major religions (Islamic and Christianity). Of all the federal democracies in the world, only India can match Nigeria’s cultural complexity (Joseph 2006: 15). If well managed, this factor of unity in diversity would have been a major asset to the Nigerian state since diversity has both positive and negative sides and some societies use it as a veritable tool for growth, social mobilization and transformation, but the contrary is the case, it has remained a major challenge to the survival and educational development. Nigeria’s cultural diversity is politicized and exploited by the elite in such a way that it retards the nation’s growth and progress. All developed countries of the world have literacy rates above 80%, Nigeria has about 40-50% literacy rate and this is a serious drag on development, when countries are clamouring to reinforce the importance of human capital as a key factor of production, Nigerians are busy falling back on national ethnic sentiments in fighting for their real or imagined interest. Japan, had more than 80% literacy by the time it began its economic recovery after the Hiroshima bombings in 1945. South Korea, under the leading of its famous prime minister General Park, invested so much in education and in no distant time produced outstanding human capital to compete against its more established neighbour, Japan. Singapore thrives today in a difficult peninsula because it boosts outstanding human capital based on highly educated citizens. Access to basic education is a cardinal component of the Millennium Development Goal on education. In Nigeria, we cannot ensure universal education if we cannot guarantee access to quality education for every citizen. Today, public education is equal to no education and the problem affects all aspects of Nigerians national life such as in Federal and even local resources allocation, management of public institutions (Dudley, 1973: Egwu, 1993: Ake, 1996: Anber, 1967), and youth development (Babawale, 2003: Akineyele, 2001). The problem has fuelled several bloody clashes between ethnic neighbours across the country (See Albert, 1993: Atiti and Albert, 1999: Uwazie, Albert and Uzoigwe, 1991: Albert, 2001), destabilized the country, most especially at national level (Nnoli, 1978: Mustapha, 2002, 2004) and even produced a civil war in 1967-1970.

The table below shows the distribution of ethnic groups in Nigeria.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Groups</th>
<th>Percentage of population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hausa &amp; Fulani</td>
<td>29%</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yoruba</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Igbo (Ibo)</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ijaw</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kanuri</td>
<td>4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ibibio</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
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<td>Tiv</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
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Source: CIA- The World Fact Book.

The theme of this conference, “Emerging Trends for Sustainability in Global Social Sciences: Opportunities and Challenges” therefore becomes an interesting forum to discuss worldwide for the need to create a synergy whereby stakeholders in education, the political class, the organized private sector and others should work as a theme to create sound educational system that cuts across all forms of human behaviour to promote genuine aspirations to contribute positively to national development.

Conceptual Clarifications

Ethnicity

Azeez (2004) views ethnicity as a sense of people hood that has its foundation in the combined remembrance of past experience and common aspirations. Nigeria is a pluralistic society made up of over 250 ethnic groups with many sub-groups; in which three ethnic groups- Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo-dominate the political landscape. All other ethnic groups are swept under the carpet.

Nnoli (1980) defines ethnicity as a social phenomenon associated with interaction among members of different groups with some social formation distinguished by communal characteristics of language and culture boundary. It refers to the relation between ethnic groups within the same political system. Ethnicity constitutes a way in which people think of themselves and others, and masses sense of world around them (Alanamu, 2004), (Nnoli, 1980; IDEA International 2000, Quoted in Alanamu, 2004) can also be regarded as the employment of ethnic identity and differences to gain advantage in situation of competition, conflict and cooperation. Going by the above assertion by Nnoli, one can deduce that Nigerian politics has presented an image of struggle among various ethnic groups for the sharing of national resources. Osaghae (1995) defined ethnicity as “the employment of mobilization of ethnic identity and difference to gain advantage in situations of competition, conflict or cooperation”.

Politics

The concept of politics is diverse. Aristotle and Plato defined politics as a concept with general issues affecting the whole community. This involves the pursuit of public interest, the operation of the state and the formulation and execution of public policy. Contrasting public concern with private matters, they viewed the public concern as morally superior. Thus, political leaders have the responsibility to conform to constructive ideas and actions with “perfect goodness” (Andrain, 1975. p. 12).

Peace

Like other concepts in social discourse, peace has no universal definition. However, it has been generally defined as the absence of war, fear, conflict, anxiety, suffering and violence (David
But this conception has been criticized by many scholars for being inadequate for understanding the meaning and nature of peace (Ibeanu, 2006). The Norwegian peace theorist, Johan Galtung distinguishes three types of violence that can help to understand the concept of peace namely:

1. Direct violence manifested by physical, emotional and psychological violence,
2. Structural violence which comes in the form of deliberate policies and structures that course human suffering, death and harm, and
3. Cultural violence which involves cultural norms and practices that creates discrimination, injustice and human suffering (David, 2006).

**Development**

Sen (2008) sees development as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. According to her, development requires the removal of major sources of non-freedom; poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect and public facilities as well as intolerance or over activity of repressive states. In this conceptualization freedom is central to the process of development and achievement of development is dependent on the free agency of people. The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English (Hornby, 2000) defines development as “the gradual growth of something so that it becomes more advanced and stronger.”

**Educational Development**

Educational Development therefore is a term that tends to be reserved for the activity undertaken by staff that specializes in enhancing learning and teaching. Many institutions have created centres or units of educational developers whose role is to help individual teachers enhance their teaching and to assist students with their learning. Educational developers usually work closely with learning technologists in the application of computers in learning and teaching and the development of electronic resources to support students.

**Ethnic Politics in Nigeria**

Ethnic politics remains the most crucial variable in the minority question of any society. In a developed nation like America, the history of handling ethnic crises and gradual evolution of constitutional and legal mechanism that guarantee the right of the individual, have contributed to social-political harmony. But in developing countries like Nigeria, the efforts to resolve the minority question through the ethnic variable have been frustrated by other issues like religion, ethnicity and gender (Biodun, 1993). Acrimonious existence among the diverse groups and interest in Nigeria has remained the persistent factor against political stability since Nigeria’s independence. Ethnicity has manifested itself in different forms of discrimination often met out to people who are not from a particular region or place. Southerners cannot secure permanent employment in the North even though we are all Nigerians. Whenever there are crises, it is tagged to religion or ethnic violence, and the target is always on residence and properties of non-indigenes, some of whom did not know any other place as their home.

Ihonvbere (1994) traced the practice of ethnic politics to the colonial period when the system of divide and rule to purposely weaken the nationalistic aspirations and struggle of Africans. This brought about the quest for control of national resources and politicization and subsequently a deviation of Nigeria that reinforced ethnic groups, the rise of ethno-political consciousness, and the development of ethnic/regional political parties demonstrated that the British administration intentionally prevented the rise and success of Nigerian nationalism, instead promoting regionalism as a means to gain political power. The Nigerian state by British colonial officials highlighted ethno-genesis and the tension between majority and minority ethnic groups; furthermore, it reinforced...
ethnic/regional boundaries and marginalized minority ethnic groups, encouraging groups to compete as interest groups vying for political power. The Nigerian state is encompassed of various ethnicities, but the existence of multiple nationalities does not by itself constitute a political problem; in the process of modernization, the interest of ethnic groups elevate to the political realm (Ethnicity and the Nigerian State).

British colonial administrators implemented policies through this tripartite structure with the intention of producing a Nigerian federation presiding over three regional governments with legislative power. This tripartite division perpetuated ethnic divisions between the Northern Hausa/Fulani, Eastern Ibo, and Western Yoruba and between the majority and minority ethnic groups; it strengthened these ethnic identities as interest groups fighting for political representation and power, instead of allowing a wide-variety of interest groups to make claims on the Nigerian state, the federal system focused power on the three regions, ignoring the concerns of unrepresented minority ethnic groups. The existence of these three politically-dominant ethnic groups conveyed the contribution of colonialism to ethno-genesis and its effect on the individual ethnic identities of the various peoples within Nigeria.

The Threat Ethnic Politics Posses to Peace and Unity

It is a historical fact and a current reality that most Nigerian States are haunted by actual or potential ethnic conflicts. This is partly because of the fact that different communities continue to consciously or unconsciously rely on ethnicity to perpetuate their dominance and hegemony in an atmosphere characterized by scarce resources. From recent experience as well as studies carried out on ethnic conflicts in Nigeria there is increasing evidence to suggest that even where it has been brought under control psychological trauma (i.e. fear and suspicion) left behind are seldom healed, especially among children and women. And this poses a threat to national peace and unity since nobody is free with one another for the fear of explosives and so on, even in educational institutions and places of worship.

The wanton destruction of lives and properties worth millions of naira from ethically motivated crises has continued to destroy the peaceful nationhood in Nigeria. Notably among these violence that engulfed the country were the Zongo-Katef disturbances of February and May 1992 (Hausa-Katef); the Jukun and Tiv protracted conflict in Wukari, Taraba State of May 2001 led to military invasion of Zaki-Biam and other Tiv settlements such as Abako, Vaase, Jootar, Ikyaior and so on (Newswatch, October 29, 2001). Hence it was estimated that between 1990 and 2000 alone, the number of 1500 persons were killed during these ethnic crises in Nigeria (Egwu, 2001). These among others posed a risk of travelling to other parts of the country especially the Northern parts for the fear of been slaughtered like goats, places like Jos capital of plateau state which use to be a place of tourism has suddenly become a war zone, a Federal capital territory could be attacked and several other places like Kaduna, Kano, Bauchi etcetera; educational institutions in these locations are not excluded.

The Threat Ethnic Politics Posses to Educational Development

The road to better education is littered by obstacles that have negatively affected the development of education in Nigeria. Any society characterized with violence will not be conducive for any social interaction in the form of teaching and learning. Education cannot strive in a violent atmosphere, as the threat of insecurity will constitute negative reinforcement since teaching and learning cannot take place in an unsecured environment. Peace is a fundamental psychosocial predictor or motivation for teaching, and learning. The most aggressive obstacle this paper is interested in discussing is the manner and behaviour by which ethnic groups compete over the location and management of Federal institutions like Federal Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Educations, and Colleges of Agricultures etcetera, the recruitment of staff, the admission of students and students unionism which has always resulted into wanton destruction of lives and properties,
hindering children’s ability to concentrate and learn for the fear of attack. The struggle for allocation of resources by various ethnic groups has brought about a large numbers of Federal institutions across the nation since each ethnic group wants an institution in its area by all means and any government that do not give ears to these demands is ruined by crises and ethnic violence. The management of these institutions becomes a problem of the Federal government alone and the aggressive competition between the diverse groups in Nigeria for the control of the universities and other educational institution derives from the assumption that these institutions have significant roles to play in elite formation and recruitment in addition to the fact that the institutions generate local employment forgetting the primary objectives of these institutions to the society and the entire country. Within this framework, ethnic and sub-ethnic groups in the country are sensitive to the location of Universities, Polytechnics, and College of education, College of Agriculture etc and the appointment of their vice chancellors, provost and rectors, staff recruitment as well as admission of students. In most cases, the people of the state and communities where the Federal and State institution are located see the institutions as their personal property and would want them managed as such.

According to Ogoh (2006), the data from the National Primary Education Commission (see Francis et al 1998) shown that the central region is part of the areas of high school enrolment in Northern Nigeria. As such the problem in the region is the paucity of facilities such as classrooms. It is therefore common for schools to run from makeshift structures under the trees. This perennial problem was grossly exacerbated by the crises as schools were hurriedly shut as everyone –including teachers and pupils – fled to safety. This is particularly true in Taraba State where the Tiv and non-Tiv fled for over a year. What is more, the schools were either used as military camps by the militia or became targets to be attacked and demolished. In many of such demolished schools, the militia gangs inscribed graffiti about their motives for fighting. In some areas, such as around Akwana in Taraba State and in Tiv villages around Azara in Nasarawa State, only schools in the opposing side were demolished. Schools left standing were vandalized and the roofing sheets used for the mobile war camps for the militia. Like the impact on the family, the Tiv people had more difficulties because unlike the other ethnic groups who were in locations where schools ran, there were no schools in the refugee camps. Now that most refugees have returned, the communities are confronted with the challenges of rebuilding the demolished schools. The reality of demolished schools side by side with undamaged portends to be a cause of future friction. The pattern of disruption in Nasarawa and plateau State is different. In both places, the disruptions lasted only a few weeks as part of the initial exodus consequent on the killings. Once the security situation improved, the schools resumed, and in many cases only a few weeks and months were lost.

The other worrisome aspect is the cases of communal clashes, hostage taking, kidnapping in the Niger Delta sub-region is inimical to educational motivation, development and aspirations of children. The crises and revolution in the Niger Delta for example has melted untold hardship on Nigerians as the disruptions of oil exploration and destruction of refineries has resulted in fuel scarcity, and dwindling of national earnings, and increase in global fuel price (Campbell, 2008; African file, 2008). Education is a fundamental human right of human’s worldwide. Obanya (2007) while discussing the implication of crisis in Somalia, Liberia, and Sierra-Leone posited that education will be affected since there could be no meaningful education in a worrying society. By implication, Obanya saw as an obstacle to the realization of Education For All (EFA) goals is a feature of the realities in the crisis ridden Niger Delta. According to Ibukun (2006) “Education for All by the year 2015 is an integral objective of the Millennium Development Goal. The question is, can Nigeria beat the deadline of eradicating illiteracy in the year 2015 if most rural communities in the riverine areas do not have access to the education of their children? Ethnic groups in Nigeria come together to “fight” one another once a new Vice Chancellor is to be appointed. And this as a matter of fact has rather posed a threat for the smooth development of these educational institutions since merit and performance are sacrificed on the altar of such sentimental issues as ethnic and religious affiliations,
all these limit the extent to which these institutions could effectively develop. There are several cases of this type of problem in the country. Vice chancellors are also under pressure when staff and students of these institutions become a critical factor in Nigeria politics (Uwezie, Albert and Uzoigwe 1999). As groups among themselves over religious issues, land ownership and the need to reform the Nigerian state generally, they politicize the question of who should head the institutions, how staff should be recruited and how students should be admitted. Most of the institutional heads that were appointed before this period served outside their state of origin did well and these institutions too had a face of development. The list includes Professor Akinkugbe, a Yoruba man, who served as the Vice Chancellor of the Ahmadu Bello University, a Hausa-Fulani enclave; Professor Adamu University of Benin and even got a second term; Professor J. Ezeilo, an Igbo and Christian who served as the Vice Chancellor of the Bayero University in Kano, a centre of Islamic civilization; Professor Essien-Udom, an Ibibio was at the University of Maiduguri, the Kanuri heartland; Professor Tekena Tamuno, an Ijaw, served as the VC of the University of Ibadan; Professor Onwuemchili, an Igbo, was at the University of Ife as the VC, and Professor Ayandele, a Yoruba, as the VC of the University of Calabar. These records can also be seen and compared in Polytechnics, Colleges of Education, and Colleges of Agriculture etcetera.

In Nigeria, the growth and development of education has always been influenced by politics. The National Policy on Education (Federal Government of Nigeria- FGN, 2004) which was first published in 1977 and revised several times is the government way of achieving part of its national objectives by using education as a tool. Using education as a vehicle, the federal government desires to achieve the following objectives:

- 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 of bright and full opportunities for all citizens (FGN, 2004:6)

Considering these beautiful objectives, the questions that comes to the mind is what is the status of the Nigerian educational system today since the formulation of this policy? It is a common reality that the Nigerian system of education is in a serious crisis at all levels. At the primary levels, there is poor enrolment, lack of qualified teachers, examination irregularities, lack of basic infrastructural and instructional facilities just to mention a few. At the tertiary level, there is gross under funding, low quality of graduates, high dropout rate due to poor academic performance, brain drain due to poor condition of service, poor staff/student ratio, poor laboratory and library facilities (Akpa, 2002).

**Government Efforts for promoting peace and unity**

The efforts made by the Government to promote national unity and consciousness through the educational sector, has been frustrated over the years by this ethnic virus. Some of these strategies include the following;

**Unity Schools**

This was a move initiated by the federal government to enhance national unity and integration as a strategy to “catch them young” These are federal secondary schools sited all over the country, the assumption was that if students at this level are integrated, they would become better Nigerians. But the admission policy opened up disintegrative implications in its application through the so-called quota system where brilliant students are denied admission because of where they come from. And parent at the other side would not want their wards or children posted in other parts of the country for fear of attacks and violence.
The National Youth Service Corps Scheme

The establishment of this scheme by decree No 24 of May 22, 1973 was primarily to build in Nigerian Youths the spirit of selfless service to the community and the spirit of oneness and brotherhood of all Nigerians irrespective of their cultural or social backgrounds. Ojo (2009), the implication of the scheme has been marred with corruption, favouritism in postings, wanton killings of corps members during ethno-religious crises etc. In addition, no matter how meritorious a “non-indigene” corps member may have served in his place of primary assignment, he cannot be considered for employment in such an organization thus truncating the integrative potentials.

Federal Character Principle / Quota System

According to Agbodike (2004) the federal character emphasizes the need for ethnic balancing as a necessity in the evolution of Nigerian citizenship and for ensuring less acrimonious relationship among various peoples of Nigeria. But unfortunately, the federal character principle, while stressing the imperative of ethnic balancing, invariably enthrones ethnic consciousness and de-emphasizes the national consciousness. The principle has produced a multiple citizenship which invariably engenders discrimination in jobs, admissions to educational institutions, marriage, business transactions and the distribution of social welfare services (Ojo, 2009) The integrative strategies have been counterproductive in some cases and have rather deepened ethnic sentiments and conflicts in Nigeria educational system in terms of admissions, staff recruitment, distribution of facilities and equipment and this has affected the standard of education in the country since merit and performance is sacrificed for the absence of inter-ethnic accommodation. It no longer matters who can do it well but who is from a particular area etcetera.

The Contribution of This Paper to Knowledge

This paper has demonstrated that although education can serve as a vehicle for national integration, Nigeria has not adequately exploited education to promote integration. The acrimonious existence among the diverse groups and interest in Nigeria has remained the persistent factor against peace and educational development since Nigeria’s independence. Nigerian education has rather undermined integration through unequal access and curriculum or administrative practices that have deepened ethnic identities. Education is made of components that include the curriculum, the philosophy and the methods of teaching. The curriculum deals with what to teach and the philosophy – why it should be taught (Joof & Mezieobi, 1995). It is deducible that the curriculum is based on the philosophy, and thus changes in the growth, development, and objective realities of societies must be captured by the curriculum in the form of reforms. The education of a society is expected to induct its people into its values, culture, ideology, national interest, and common destiny. Nigerian education is deficient in this regard. The philosophy of Nigerian education, as contained in the National Policy on Education (1977) centre on: 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 of bright and full opportunities for all citizens. The issue of ethnic politics and its threat to educational development is the interest of this paper, and a number of points have been noted in this regard. First is the lack of ideological orientation that should indoctrinate citizens. Second is the problem of inadequate Nigerian background, as shown by the gap in the teaching of Nigerian history and culture (Okoh, 1995). This robs citizens of the knowledge that should enable them understand other groups and thus help to eliminate ethnic prejudices. Separate ethnic identities are also strengthened and deepened by a number of other interrelated factors:

1. Religion based schools, as evidenced by Muslim and Christian Schools dotted all over the country;
2. Indigence policy and practice on the appointment of heads of tertiary institutions (Vice-Chancellor, Provost Rector, Registrar), staff recruitment, and student admission;
3. Discriminatory school fees in tertiary institutions, based on indigence;
4. The quota system of admission into tertiary institutions and unity schools (Federal Government Colleges) that tend to reward ethnicity and undermine merit or academic excellence. This constantly reminds Nigerians of their ethnic homeland, and throws up feelings of rejection and deprivation.

The point to note from the above discourse is that the curriculum content and educational administration in Nigeria block the development of national consciousness, a fundamental requirement for national integration but rather influenced by ethnic politics so much as stated above. Nigerian education is an obstacle to integration. It is not because education cannot enhance integration, but Nigerian education has not been adequately focused to promote the integration of the distinct nationality groups in the country. The Nigerian curriculum should be based on an articulated political ideology; a clear definition of the ends or goals to be pursued as national interest; and a clear knowledge of the Nigerian history and destiny; that is who we are and what we want to be (Okoh, 1995).

Conclusions

Looking at the political dispensation in Nigeria today, it is an undeniable fact that the Nigerian society is divided by the factors of ethnicity and religion and this works against national peace and the smooth running of educational institutions in the country especially in terms of staff recruitment, student’s admissions, and student’s unionism just to mention a few. It is obvious that most Nigerians in a political dispensation are ready to sacrifice merit and performance on the altar of such sentimental issues as ethnic and religious afflictions, all these limit the extent to which these institutions could effectively develop. Education cannot strive in an atmosphere devoid of peace. The history of over two decade of crisis in the Nigeria has placed an untold hardship in the life of the innocent people, thus disrupting education and educational aspirations of youths and children in the country. From recent experience, ethnic politics have created conflicts in Nigeria that even when brought under control psychological trauma (i.e. fear and suspicion) still exist especially among children and women. When issues of development are being discussed, countries that easily come to the mind are those of East Asia. These are countries that have taken the bull by their horns and have liberated their people from poverty, ignorance and other forms of underdevelopment. They are collectively referred to as the “Asian Tigers”. The Asian Tigers refer to the economies of Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia. These countries have pursued, their industrialization, educational and technological development individually from which we can draw lessons for Nigeria (Kalu, 2008).

Recommendations

After critically examining ethnic politics in Nigeria as a threat to national peace and educational development, this paper has made some recommendations for maintaining national peace and educational development in the country’s subsequent political dispensation.

1. Teaching peace and conflict as a “General Studies course” with a view to making Nigerian institutions a location for the promotion of peace, understanding and tolerance, peace should be a course taught to all students in their first and second year. This will give them a grounded knowledge on how to handle all forms of conflicts, they might encounter with other Nigerians.
2. There should be a judicious use of ethnic balancing in the provision of socio-economic and political opportunities for all citizens.
3. Since 1979, the federal character principle and others deriving from it (e.g. Section 157, sub-section 5; section 197, sub-section 2; Section 199) have provided the basis for location of Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education and even Federal secondary schools (High Schools) in Nigeria as well as the personnel to man these institutions. This policy is aimed at promoting equity in the Nigerian society and making all Nigerians to have a sense of belonging. A body known as the Federal Character Commission has been established by the Federal Government to promote, enforce and monitor compliance with provisions of the Federal Character Clauses of the Nigerian Constitution.

4. The Nigerian curriculum should be based on the following: An articulated political ideology; a clear definition of the ends or goals to be pursued as national interest; and a clear knowledge of the Nigerian history and destiny – that is who we are and what we want to be (Okoh, 1995).

5. Countries facing similar crises as identified in Nigeria should use this opportunity to draw lessons from the “Asian Tigers” the economies of Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia, who have pursued, their industrialization, educational and technological development etc individually.

6. Government of these troubled states should display sincerity in their governance and relations with the opposition and warring groups.

References


