
NATIONAL IDENTITY CRISIS, CORRUPTION, AND THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN REBUILDING PATRIOTIC CONSCIOUSNESS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Nigeria still struggles to develop after many democratic transitions and anti-corruption campaigns because of its pervasive corruption. Most studies have analyzed corruption through the legal, political, and economic lenses. Research on corruption and Nigeria's persistent national identity crisis has been largely ignored. This paper explores the connections between the crisis of national identity, corruption, and the function of education in the restoration of patriotic consciousness in Nigeria. Using the Social Identity Theory of Tajfel and Turner (1979), this paper asserts that corruption is the product of weak institutions and fragmented loyalties, a fractured society, and a plummeting confidence in the institutions of the state. The paper employs a qualitative method through the analysis of literature, policy, and history in relation to the Nigerian project of nation building and civic education. It argues that the persistent religious, ethnic, and regional divisions of Nigeria have eroded the citizens' feelings of belonging to the Nigerian state, and have resulted in a society where corruption is regarded as a normal practice. The paper argues that patriotic education is the best way to rebuild patriotic consciousness and strengthen national identity in order to reduce corruption, rebuild public trust and promote sustainable national development in Nigeria.

Keywords: National identity, Corruption, Patriotic consciousness, Civic Education, Nation building.

Introduction

Some consider Nigeria Africa's largest democracy. Others consider Nigeria Central Africa's leading state. Nigeria's population and position make it important. Nigeria, however, still plunges resources and manpower into development issues. World Bank (2024) notes issues of corruption, violence, and the abuse of the state's power are the leading concerns. The effects of the issues have caused a lot of research to understand the issues and the effect on the development of the nation. One of the leading concerns for scholars is the identity of the nation, and why it is so important to study it, in regards to Nigeria's development crisis.

The identity of a nation can also be described as a large community with a common membership. It has been said, that national identity allows for a community of citizens with a common destiny to have a record and share a memory of the past. Anderson (1983) describes it as an identity that allows a large community the members to be a part of a community that is anticipated, even if they have not met the majority of their fellow citizens. A national identity that is stable is able to unify a large community to achieve goals that are of a great importance. However, a national identity that is not stable is able to unify a large community to achieve goals that are of a great importance.

The level of corruption in Nigeria cannot be fully explained by the state of the country's institutions. Corruption is the result of the inadequate mechanisms to enforce the law, insufficient transparency and corruption and the latent social and identity and civic corruption (Joseph, 1987; Ake, 1996). In settings where there is little attachment of the citizenry to the national institutions, loyalty to the ethnic, religious and regional groups may be greater than the commitment to the public morality. There is a high likelihood that in these settings, corruption may be socially accepted if it is perceived to be of benefit to the group concerned.

With this in mind, education becomes increasingly valuable for national development. The benefits of education extend beyond the acquisition of knowledge and skills. It is also a means of socialization and a tool for the formation of values, citizenship, and identity. (Dewey, 1916; Durkheim, 1956.). Countries embed social norms and values through educational systems and define the responsibilities of its members to the society. Thus, education becomes important for the quest of building national integration and responsible citizenship. To this end, this paper looks at the conceptual building blocks of corruption and national identity. It addresses Nigeria's identity crisis and its historical and contemporary manifestations and addresses the fragmentation of identity and the role education has in rehabilitating patriotic consciousness for the sake of national development.

Historical and Contemporary Dimensions of Nigeria's National Identity Crisis

The study cannot consider Nigeria's current national identity crisis without examining the leading factors in the country's evolution. The modern crises related to ethnicity, religion, regionalism, and citizenship have their origins in factors that were present before Nigeria even became independent. Nigeria has made strides in state building since 1960. However, many of the conditions that were present during identity fragmentation still exist and continue to affect the political climate and the public's perception of the state.

Colonial Foundations of Identity Fragmentation

Nigeria's national identity crisis can be traced back to the colonial decisions in 1914 when all the ethnic, linguistic, cultural groups, and tribes were brought together under one administration. At that time, there was no intent to bring together disparate groups to form one nation. The groups, (Ake, 1996) still had their distinct identity, customs and social organization. The British colonial rule complicated the nation building with the policy of indirect rule. While indirect rule made administration easy, it empowered local, ethnic and regional rule, as colonial rule administered through traditional authorities (Osaghae, 2006).

Post Independence Politics and the Challenge of Nation Building

After Nigeria's 1960 independence, the new leadership had to work towards political integration after territorial unification. However, political competition in the First Republic was organized around ethnicity and regions. Consequently, major political parties reinforced political mobilization on the basis of identity and made the process of national integration increasingly difficult (Suberu, 2001).

The political instability and eventually the military coups of 1966 and the Nigerian Civil War from 1967 to 1970 showed the delicate nature of Nigeria's national unity. The Nigerian Civil War is an important event in the history of Nigeria. The War showcased that the various regional and ethnic divisions in Nigeria could undermine the unity of the Nigerian State. The "No Victor, No Vanquished" post-civil-war policy aimed at building national integration, promoted reconciliation (and) aimed at being a peace policy. However, the major issues that were the causes of the Nigerian Civil War were not resolved.

Military rule later on sought to address national integration in Nigeria by the introduction of the Nigerian National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), the Federal Character Principle, the introduction of unity schools and state creation. These policies were aimed at reducing regional inequities (and) were also meant to be a form of interaction of citizens of the various regions of Nigeria. They were only successful to a certain level. The initiatives also did not reduce regional inequities and did not create a strong sense of national identity in Nigerians.

Contemporary Manifestations of the National Identity Crisis

Multiple efforts of nation-building have led many to suggest that Nigeria is continuously struggling to grasp a national identity. One of the most visible signs of this is the persistence of ethnic politics. Electoral competitions are often construed along ethnic and regional lines, with candidates often mobilizing support through appeals to ethnic identity. Consequently, political loyalty is often directed to regional or ethnic leaders as opposed to democratic institutions or national interests.

An important component of the identity crisis is the growing religious polarization. The increasing tension and friction among the existing diverse communities has been the major cause of the increasing social fragmentation in Nigeria. This has also been exacerbated by the exploitation of religious identities by some politicians to serve personal interests, thereby deepening division and undermining the social trust of the constituency (Kukah, 2011).

Youth Disillusionment and Civic Alienation

A major aspect of the identity crisis in present-day Nigeria is the level of disillusionment among the young people. Since the youth are a large segment of the population and a resource for the development of Nigeria, the combination of high levels of unemployment, economic difficulties, insecurity, and a perception of political exclusion has a damaging effect, leading many young Nigerians to be frustrated.

The 2020 End SARS protests showed the frustrations of Nigerian youth. Initially, the protests showed discontent for police brutality. They advanced to demands for better governance, accountability, and social justice. It showed that a large segment of the population is interested in reform and large segment of the population feels alienated from the political infrastructure.

This civic alienation has serious implications for nation building. People that feel they are not a part of the state will not have an emotional attachment to the state. Therefore, efforts to improve national identity must address the tangible needs for justice and social equity, in addition to the symbolic need for unity.

National Identity Crisis and Unrelenting Corruption in Nigeria

Corruption is widely acknowledged to be an important constraint on Nigeria's socioeconomic and political development. Attempts to combat corruption by establishing the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), and implementing various reforms to the public sector have had little effect on corruption's negative impact on governance and public institutions, and the development of the country. While a number of factors,

including the weakness of institutions and the poor enforcement of laws, explain the persistence of corruption in Nigeria, they do so partially. To fully understand it, we need to analyze how fragmented identities influence the attitude of citizens toward the public good, the demand for accountability, and the political elite.

One of the best accounts of corruption in postcolonial Africa is provided by Ekeh's (1975) "Two Publics" theory. Ekeh posited that in African societies, there are generally two moral spheres in which people operate. The first is the primordial public, which are the ethnic, kin, religious, and communal networks. In the constructs of the primordial public, members are expected to be loyal and to exhibit generosity and social responsibility. The second is the civic public, which contains the state and its institutions, and which generally lacks a moral legitimacy and emotional presence.

This idea applies to Nigeria as well. Many people are devoted to their families and communities but have weaker attachments to the state. They can justify behavior that others may find unethical if that behavior is seen to benefit their group. Members of the public are likely to think it is the responsibility of the public official to provide opportunities, contracts, and employment to people of their community. Not doing this is more likely to be seen as disloyal to the community than as upholding public ethics.

Corruption is, therefore, rationalized in Nigeria within a broader moral framework that sees community obligations more important than obligations to the state. This creates a problem in the fight against corruption. People will be critical of corruption in the abstract but will support corrupt people if they think this serves the interests of the community.

Many anti-corruption campaigns have been initiated since the beginning of the fourth republic in Nigeria. Although some have seen a degree of success, a large number of initiatives have been of little value in the sustained improvement of public accountability. One of the reasons for this is that anti-corruption measures have focused on the implementation of laws at the expense of addressing the social and

cultural determinants of corruption.

Laws and institutions are basic elements of anti-corruption strategies. Alone, they will not succeed where social norms sanction unethical behavior. Corruption, normalized in social and political networks, makes anti-corruption measures difficult to enforce and even counterproductive. International anti-corruption campaigns tend to lose credibility when they are perceived as politically motivated or directed against specific social or political groups.

The persistence of politically motivated, identity-based loyalties complicates reforms. In trials and investigations perceived through ethnic and party line loyalties, even the enforcement of corruption measures will not succeed.

Education and the Transformation of Patriotic Consciousness in Nigeria

Education is one of the foundations of nation building and social change and improvement. In addition to developing human capital and stimulating economic growth, education is essential to develop and adjust social values, civic attitudes, and collective identity. Educational institutions are a state mechanism to promote national awareness, social integration, and active citizenship (Dewey, 1916; Durkheim, 1956). Considering the diversity of Nigeria, education has great possibilities to promote unity, civic engagement, and a dedication to national development.

In societies undergoing identity fragmentation, the linkage of education and patriotic consciousness is of utmost importance. Patriotic consciousness is not a passively acquired trait of citizenship and can therefore only be acquired through socialization and exposure to common values, aspirations, national symbols, civic duties, and concerns. In this case, a pedagogical institution is among the key mechanisms of creating a sense of belonging and dedication to the nation (state). Through the many different types of learning, both formal and informal, individuals are enabled to acquire the attitudes, values, and knowledge of responsible citizenship.

Researchers and public administrators agree on the connection between education and nation building. Dewey (1916) points out that democratic societies rely on educational systems that aim to prepare citizens to take an active role in the public sphere. He also adds that education has a moral function of social integration. It encodes the norms and values of a society. Both of these positions allow us to suggest that instruction should not only concern academic knowledge. It should also embrace the development of civic character and social identity.

Education in Nigeria after independence was supposed to promote national integration. Some of the new subjects (Social Studies, Civic Education, Government and History) were meant to raise national consciousness and promote responsible citizenship. National initiatives such as the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) were developed in order to achieve the same purpose as education and promote contact among youths of the different ethnic and regional groups.

Although Nigeria has made attempts to achieve the nation building goal of education, it has not been successful. Many graduates have good academic qualifications, but have a poor sense of civic responsibility and public morality. This indicates that the criterion for the success of education should not only be examinations and jobs, but the degree of integrity, civic awareness and involvement in the affairs of the nation that these individuals have.

A significant limitation of civic education in Nigeria is that the dominant model is exam-centered education. In many schools, civic education is taught as a theoretical classroom instruction focusing on the memorization of constitutional provisions, the structure of Government, and Citizenship rights. Knowledge of the above is important, but learning citizenship rights does not necessarily lead to an understanding of civic responsibility and result in active civic participation.

Students learn in the classroom the concepts of democracy, accountability, and national unity without the obligation to practice

these concepts. Civic education, therefore, creates an informed citizenry but does not create responsible citizens. Education in general, and civic education in particular, is an ineffective tool to combat the menace that corruption has become in Nigeria and to strengthen the citizens' sense of national consciousness.

In addition to the problems highlighted above, the inadequate funding of the educational system particularly in the areas of educational infrastructure, and investment in the development of teachers, and curriculum innovation have severely limited schools' capacities to deliver citizenship education of a higher order. Many teachers are trained in civic education to levels that do not allow the teachers to become effective social change agents.

Citizenship education can also be improved by experiential learning. There are numerous opportunities to reinforce civic values with Service Learning, Community Development, Student Leadership, and Civic Engagement. Not only are these activities beneficial to the community, but they also improve students' understanding and support for active citizenship. Recent studies in 2015 by UNESCO show a strong correlation between the active participation in community activities and internal support for civic activities.

Attitudes and values of children are molded by the adults in their lives, and teachers are particularly critical to the molding of school aged children. Bandura's (1986) Social Learning Theory states that behaviors may be learned by observing and imitating. Teachers, in this case, are both content instructors and the facilitators of socially responsible behavior.

In enhancing professional development for teachers, we need to place greater emphasis on the training of educators as facilitators of ethical civic discourse about citizenship, governance, and national development as this training will allow teachers to better cultivate positive civic engagement.

Institutions of learning, such as schools and classrooms, need to reflect the values of civic engagement that they desire to instill. For

instance, civic engagement values such as accountability, transparency, and equity need to be in the structures of the school and its governance as barriers to the school's accountability and equity must be experienced by the students in the civic engagement values of the governance and administration of the schools.

Reconstructing patriotic consciousness in education influences sustainable development in Nigeria. Patriotism and the sense of duty to the collective community are not limited to the advancement of the community's economy and its technology. A cohesive national identity strengthens social trust and participation, resulting in a better and more effective public service and a positive influence on long-term governance and development.

Educating for patriotic consciousness supports the weakening of public corruption and the strengthening of public accountability. Citizens who have a strong sense of national consciousness will not justify the plundering of public resources on the basis of loyalty to a particular ethnicity or region. Education for patriotism and civic improvement will serve both the development of the nation and the removal of public corruption.

Rebuilding Nigeria's national identity is a multi-faceted process that goes beyond political and structural reforms. It goes beyond these and is a long-term commitment to instill and develop preferences, mentalities, and citizenship values that elevate national interests above sectional interests. Education is one of the most powerful and long-lasting means of National Identity construction.

Conclusion

This paper examined the intersection of corruption, Nigeria's national identity crisis, and the role of education in fostering patriotism and sustainable development. While corruption stems from weak institutions and ineffective law enforcement, this paper argues that Nigeria's corruption crisis also stems from the ethnic, regional, and religious divisions that undermine the public's trust and national unity. This paper uses Social Identity Theory and 's Two Publics Thesis to argue that the strong loyalty that sub-national groups have is good

enough to warrant the defensive explanation of a corrupt act. This paper argues that the combination of civic and patriotic education and along with institutional reform will promote national unity, the rule of law, and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Suggestions

This study advocates for Nigeria to reform its education system such that civic responsibility, patriotism, ethical values, and national unity are prioritized over academic success. Integrity, tolerance, accountability, respect for diversity, and engaged citizenship need to be emphasized. To this end, community service and civic engagement need to be incorporated into the education system, along with leadership development. Teacher training must be updated to equip educators with the skills and knowledge needed to teach peace, ethical leadership, and responsible citizenship.

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