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THE CALL FOR MATHEMATICS AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: *IMPLICATION FOR NATIONAL UNITY IN DIVERSITY.*

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Abstract
Nigeria has been struggling with how to uphold unity in diversity among its various religious and ethno-linguistic groups since the attainment of its independence in 1960. Succeeding governments have applied different methods aimed at upholding national unity but Nigeria remains divided. No society can actually attain its expected developmental heights when the elements of unity are lacking. It is a general opinion to say that development is to a great extent determined by an atmosphere of unity. Any nation that desires to be developed must as a matter of necessity follow the path of unity. The National Policy on Education in Nigeria lays emphasis on national unity, moral and religious values, social equality and responsible citizenship as the major features in attracting harmonious co-existence among people (Federal Ministry of Education, FRN 2004). This work discussed the call for mathematics and vocational education for upholding national unity in Nigeria under the following sub-topics: introduction, review of Nigeria context, concept of national unity, concept of mathematics education, concept of vocational education, upholding national unity through mathematics and vocational education, and activities in mathematics and vocational education that uphold national unity in Nigeria. This work shall have achieved its aim if Nigeria becomes more united through the platforms which Mathematics and Vocational Education have continued to offer through their interactive fora and conferences across the country.

Keywords: National unity, Mathematics education, Vocational education, Diversity, Nigeria.

Introduction

Nigeria is the most populous nation in West Africa, with numerous ethnic groups characterized by disunity, division, hatred and acrimony. A natural kind of hatred exists among one ethnic group against another. For instance, a tribesman feels relaxed and comfortable only with a person from his or her ethnic nationality. This is a challenge among ethnic groups in Nigeria. There is no peaceful co-existence among the different ethnic groups. Though, there may be business transactions but there is no harmony. The divergent nature of ethnic groups in Nigeria is full of disregard, disrespect, conflict, acrimony, hostility lack of sympathy and so on. This is where the study of mathematics and vocational education play major

responsibilities. Mathematics being a compulsory subject to be offered at all levels in Nigeria educational system and being a gate way for entrance into institutions of higher learning, indicates that all Nigerians share common knowledge and reasoning. The fact that one is an Igbo, Hausa or Yoruba is unintentional to the being of the individual person. Consequently, the study of mathematics and vocational education play imperative role in uniting Nigerians together through classroom interactions, conferences, seminars competitions etc. The overall aim of education in the Nigerian traditional society was character training and job orientation and one of the goals of formal education in Nigeria is for building a united, strong and self-reliant nation (*Federal Republic of Nigeria*, 2013). This work discussed the need for mathematics and vocational education in upholding national unity in Nigeria.

A Review of Nigeria Context

Nigeria, well known as the giant of Africa is the most heavily populated country in Africa and the seventh most heavily populated country in the world (Dike, 2015). It is subdivided into thirty-six (36) states and one federal capital territory. The states are further subdivided into seven hundred and seventy four (774) local government areas. As a federation of many different nations, Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa with about 160 million people (Asaju & Egberi, 2015). The religious, ethnic, and cultural diversities of the nation make it a unique one. Mustapha (2007) classifies 374 ethnic groups which are largely divided into ethnic 'majorities' and ethnic 'minorities'. The majority ethnic groups are the Hausa-Fulani of the north, the Yoruba of the southwest, and the Igbo of the southeast. However, the relationship between these groups is characterized by fear and suspicion of domination of one state or ethnic group by another. Meanwhile, this suspicion and fear between groups is historical.

This disunity was obvious when Sir Fredrick Lord Lugard began the process of subjecting ethnic groups with a history of mutual distrust and hatred together as one Nigeria. These ethnic groups are not of equal population and consequently some tend to control others thereby exploiting them. In addition, political and economic discrepancies exist among these various states or ethnic groups that make up Nigeria. These discrepancies arose as a result of the nature and quality of the post colonial Nigerian state. The groups had never considered themselves as parts of one nation. These have lead to unpleasant socio-economic competition among the various ethnic groups which have also resulted to ethno-regional conflicts and damages.

The surfacing of assorted militant groups in the Niger Delta, O'odua People's Congress (OPC) in the South-West, MASSOB in the South East and recent Boko-Haram in the North, are all signals of the presence of oppositions among the different ethnic groups over the distribution of national cake (Egharevba &Aghedo, 2016). These ethnic, regional, and religious differences in Nigeria have happened to be so problematic with resultant models of inequalities. These inequalities are caused by a complex range of factors, including history, geography, cultural orientation, religious association, natural resource endowments, current government policies, and past colonial policies (Asaju & Egberi, 2015). The problem of ethnic minority has been receiving attention of scholars and practitioners of governance and development. This is because ethnic minority is usually marginalized and ignored by the majority in decision making and in distribution of the natural resources (Aderonke, 2013). The outcome of such act of exclusion has been protested which at times results to brutal violent in the society.

Nigeria as a society is a system of human cooperation. The question of how the society can normally involve the minority groups in decision making to ensure unity requires adequate policy consideration. Lack of tolerable representation by the ethnic groups amounts to a great menace to national unity. Despite the approval of the federal character principles since 1979, achieving national unity has been a difficult task. The fundamental is to make sure that government decisions on building industries, construction of roads, awarding scholarships, appointment of public office holders, admission, employment and revenue allocations etc are distributed equally. The problem arises from the fact that, there is still a high rate of irregularity in the areas of government decisions mentioned above. Consequently, Nigeria has been faced with various strains and hostility. Over the years, intolerance, quarrel and brutality have been obviously exhibited in the religious and political situations in Nigeria. Inter-ethnic and Religious crisis such as in Jos-Plateau crisis and many other northern states, Niger delta militancy, Boko Haram insurgency, herdsmen crisis in Uzo-Uwani, Ezeagu, Agileri and Umuleri crisis Tiv-Jukun Crisis, among others have directly or indirectly hindered national unity and peaceful co-existence among individuals with destructions of life and property. If any country desires national unity, it is Nigeria. Nigeria has good policies that can ensure national unity. Some of the policies according to Asaju and Egberi, (2015) include the introduction of Unity Schools,

National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), state and local government creation, quota system and federal character. Regardless of all these policy measures, achieving national unity among the various ethnic and religious groups has been a delusion. The ability of the state to resolve the recurring crises and to create an enabling environment where the people's respect and love for their nation is enhanced would positively affect the intonation of the national unity (Aderonke, 2013). This will help to bring about a situation where the different ethnic groups can be together without crisis and it's like. Mathematics and vocational education are most powerful weapon that can be used to achieve unity in Nigeria.

The Concept of National Unity

National unity is a situation where the entire people, groups and organization of a country collaborate peacefully and comprehend each other. It can also be seen as a situation where different ethnic groups in a country can co-exist and work together without conflicts. It entails the condition where the people in a country can enjoy freedom to live and own property in any part of the country without discrimination. The overall conditions that portray national unity signify that there will be no discriminations in terms of employment opportunity, awarding contracts, positions in governmental institutions and establishment.

National unity demands a commonality within citizens of a nation, with close adherence to law and order. It advocates a "community of communities" which respects diversity and share values, experiences and geographical relativity. It is characterized by love, cooperation, tolerance, peace and harmony, progress, sustainable development to mention but few. National unity provides people with enabling environment that will attract manufacturers, entrepreneurs and businessmen to establish industries anywhere in the country without fear; and as a result, the issue of unemployment and poverty will be solved. National unity is necessary in order to maintain a harmonious and functional society. It contributes to national development as one aspect of national development revolves around economic developments which may lead to prominent standards of living; decreased poverty rate and income disparity. National unity in the form of ethnic and religious tolerance is an increases societal peace

To say that Nigeria lacks national unity is not an over statement. There is total absence of the characteristics nature of unity in Nigeria; there is no love, no cooperation, and no peace among the ethnic groups in Nigeria. Nigeria has good symbols of national unity but they are not practical. The motto in the national coat of arm is "Unity and Faith, Peace and Progress", the white colour in the national flag represents "Peace, Unity and Love" among the people of Nigeria. The national anthem represents a call on Nigerians to serve the nation with the spirit of love, one nation bound in freedom, peace and unity. The national pledge was formulated as a result of experience from Nigeria civil war. The civil war was fought in order to preserve the unity of the great nation, Nigeria. These symbols are meant to uphold unity but the reverse is the case. The only national symbol that upholds unity in Nigeria is the national currencies as it is mathematically oriented.

Menace to National Unity in Nigeria

Nigeria as a nation has suffered a lot of menace both in the past and present. Most states in Nigeria's geopolitical zones have been under severe terrorist attacks by the Boko Haram insurgent movement since 2009. When translated literally, 'Boko Haram' means 'Western culture is evil or sinful'. Boko-Haram insurgencies have been a great threat to national unity in Nigeria. Aligned with terrorist operations, they use different approaches including suicide bombing, kidnapping, fire-raising, killing, raping etc. One arrested Boko Haram member confessed that he killed 23 people in two days (Egharevba &Aghedo, 2016). Definitely, Egharevba &Aghedo also noted that the Boko Haram violent campaign resulted in 85 deaths from 35 incidents in 2010, increasing to 550 deaths in 115 incidents in 2011. And there were over a thousand Boko Haram-related deaths from 290 incidents in 2012. And over 800 lives have been lost so far in 2013. The major intentions of the terrorists include Christian worship centres, media houses, public buildings, markets, banks, schools and security formations such as police stations and army barracks.

The Boko-Haram insurgency has led to the internal displacement of several people especially southerners who were resident in the North. Camps had to be created in the South-East for temporary accommodation of the arrival of Igbo people arriving from the North who had become 'refugees in their own country (Egharevba &Aghedo, 2016). Most state governments had to send vehicles to transport their indigenes home because of the Boko-Haram attacks on non-Muslims especially southerners. The terrorism has extended disunity in Nigeria and has raised ethnic and religious distrust, rivalry and hatred between groups especially between Muslims and Christians, Hausa/Fulani and Igbos etc.

Another group that brings menace to unity in Nigeria is the herdsmen. The herdsmen who are the Fulani have caused a lot of havocs in the country. The practices of these Fulani herdsmen in many states have involved serious disagreement and intolerance which have resulted to killing, kidnapping and destruction of peoples' farm and properties. For instance, the herdsmen crisis in Nimbo Uzo-uwani, Ezeagu and many other places Enugu state, crisis in Benue state which have taken the lives of many people including two Catholic Priests in Oturkpo Diocese, crisis in Kogi state, and many other states in Nigeria. The bitterest experience from these herdsmen is the kidnappings and killing of Catholic Priests in the southeast states in Nigeria. This has been of a great concern to the Catholic Church and the society at large.

Concepts Mathematics and Mathematics Education

Mathematics is a branch of science, which deals with numbers and their operations. It involves calculation, computation, solving of problems etc. Its dictionary meaning states that, 'Mathematics is the science of numbers and space' or 'Mathematics is the science of measurement, quantity and magnitude'. It may also be defined as, 'the study of quantity, structure, space and change; it has historically developed from counting, calculation, and measurement. The need for mathematics can be said to be as old as mankind which arose out of man's wish to count and keep accounts of things around him. There is precisely an aspect of mathematics in all human endevours. It is a universal language used even in the Bible as figured out by Agwagah (2017),

> "*In the creation of the universe, God used mathematics; God wrote the universe in mathematical language and the letters are triangles, circles and other geometric shapes. In the book of Wisdom 11:20b, "but you have chosen to measure, count and weigh everything you do".*

Mathematics reveals hidden patterns that help us to understand the world around us. It deals with data, measurements and observations from science, with conclusion, deduction, and proof; and with mathematical models of natural experience of human behavior and of social structure. On a fundamental level, there is need to be able to count, add, subtract, multiply, and divide at a mental and psychological levels, exposure to mathematics helps to develop analytic mind and assists in better organization of ideas and accurate expression of thoughts (Roohi, 2015).

Mathematics education is the practice of teaching and learning of mathematics. It is a powerful aspect of education that can be used to change the world around through the following: Mathematics education helps to figure out opinions and develop specific points of view through inculcation of problem solving skill; develops in individuals the quality of right behavior, good manners, sound values and virtues, self confidence and sound judgment. Roohi (2015) once stated: "the neglect of mathematics education works grievance to all knowledge, since he who is ignorant of it cannot know the other sciences or other things of the world."

The goal of education in Nigeria among others includes; the inculcation of national consciousness, value and national unity; development of appropriate skills, mental, physical and social abilities and competencies to empower the individual to live in and contributes positively to the society. The achievements of all the above mention goals are embedded in mathematics education. Maniru (2017) opined that mathematics education can contribute to the realization of the general goal of education in Nigeria by: inculcating the habit of effective thinking; inculcating the ability to estimate, check and verify result; inculcating ability to think correctly, draw conclusion, generalization and inferences; inculcating the ability to differentiate between the relevant and irrelevant data and to make relevant judgment.

Mathematics education today is that single discipline which cuts across all other discipline, hence a suitable platform for national unity. The United Nations through its education arm UNESCO, advocates for the use of mathematics education as a platform for building a culture of peace and unity. The key idea is to create a culture of tolerance and peaceful co-existence and more prominently, to respect other people in terms of their views, race, language and religion (Lin, 2014). Mathematics education brings to focus the immediate and long term facts and effects of prolonged intolerance, conflicts and violence. The concept of statistics can be used to calculate the frequencies and effect of the losses which Nigeria has experience all the years due to conflicts, violence and social injustice. The concept of mathematical modeling can be used to handle some interactive variables such ethnicity, religion, language, social injustice, intolerance, violence and war. Interactive variable can be represented by a mathematical model and simulated to observe possible outcomes and effect over time (Uwaezuoke, 2013). It is expected that when many of the interactive variable in Nigeria are handled mathematically, it will create and encourage unity in the minds the people, regarding

the universal values of respect for life, freedom, fairness, harmony, tolerance, civil liberties and equality between men and women. The distinctive natures of unity are crucial part of qualities of mathematics education.

Concept of Vocational Education

Vocational Education is a planned programme of learning experiences that initiates with investigation of career options, supports basic academic and life skills. It facilitates the achievement of high academic values, leadership qualities, preparation for industry define work and long-lasting education. Its variety of courses is career oriented and as well equips graduates with skills to work in their respective chosen tirades and professions.

The Nigeria *National Policy on Education* emphasizes greatly on vocational education as an integral part of national development strategy. *National Policy on Education* (2013) describes Vocational Education as a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the educational process involving, in addition to, general education the study of technology and related science and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupation in various sectors of economic and social life. For a country to advance both socially economically and technologically, its citizens must be productive and creative. It must have a productive citizen majority of which can be job creators rather than job seekers (Lawal, 2013). According to Lawal (2010) vocational education is seen as the types of education that prepare people who could apply significant practical skills to make positive changes within their society and afford a self dependent life.

According to Ojimba (2012), Vocational education deals with the training or retraining designed to prepare individuals to enter into a paid employment in any recognized occupation or be self-reliant. Eche and Nwankwo (2011) describe vocational education as that aspect of education which provides the recipients with the basic knowledge and practical skills needed for entry into the world of work as employees or as self-employed. Vocation education provides self employment, enhance productivity and self reliance. It prevails the over dependence of school graduates on government own jobs. Vocational education gives individual the skills to live and work as productive citizen in a contemporary society.

The goals of Vocational Education in Nigeria as outlined in the *National Policy on Education*, (FRN, 2013) shall be to.

- Provide trained manpower in the applied science and technology and business particularly at craft, advanced craft and technical level.
- Provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agriculture, commercial and economic development.
- Give training and impact the necessary skills to individual who shall be self-reliant economically.

The general philosophy of education in Nigeria according to FRN (2013) includes the building of: A free and dynamic 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. To foster these goals, education is to inculcate certain values. Two of these values which are also basic philosophies of vocational and technical education are;

- Shared responsibility for the common good of the society and
- Respect for the dignity of labour.

Certainly, it is from these objectives that vocational education objectives are improved. These objectives include:

- To provide trained manpower in the applied science, technology and business particularly at crafts, advanced craft and technical levels.
- To provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development.
- To give training and impart the necessary skills to individuals who shall be self-reliant economically (FRN, 2013).

Upholding National Unity in Nigeria through Mathematics and Vocational Education

Mathematics is a compulsory subject in Nigeria educational system and as well, vocational education is a very crucial area as far as career training is concerned in Nigeria. Following the philosophy

of education in Nigeria, mathematics as well as vocational education inculcates national consciousness and national unity (FRN, 2013). Mathematics and vocational education can be used to uphold all the attributes of national unity such as peaceful co-existence, progress, tolerance, development and many others in Nigeria. This is in line with united nation's assurance that mathematics, science, culture, technology and vocational education can be relied upon to contribute to eradication of violence. Mathematics education provides the skills of numeracy, and as well provides the values and attitudes needed for national unity. Basic mathematics education endows on people the power to think, to figure out opinions, solve problems and to work in accordance with promotion of unity, and collective respect for human rights. In mathematic as well as vocational education, every problem has at least a possible solution.

Man is a social animal and human life depends upon the co-operation of each other. Group work facilitates social skills and ability to work together in given tasks with others is a sign of peaceful co-existence. In this context, mathematical and vocational knowledge are needed for the purpose of the offer and receive process, business transacting accounting process, industries and technical vocation. Mathematics and vocational education enable individuals to be better, more useful and productive citizen of the society. Mathematics education as well as vocational education create enabling environment that will bring about good relationship among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria.

National unity can be achieved when citizens of the society understand global problems, have the skills that sustain peace and justice, live by national values of human rights and equity, appreciate ethnic diversity, and respect each other. The on-going challenges of unity; "Boko haram radicalism, Niger Delta Militancy, the winner takes it all political fanaticism, cultism, prejudice, Fulani herdsmen crisis" have clearly put the country in hostile situation. The country is filled with fear and suffering populace that cannot co-exist. Mathematics and vocational education can be used to handle these emerging issues by building a total peace through cultivating a culture of unity through:

i. Providing individuals with logical and precise content associated with challenging academic values and relevant technical knowledge and skills needed to prepare for further education and careers in current or emerging professions;
ii. Providing technical skill talent, an industry-recognized credential, a certificate, or an associate degree in the field;
iii. Providing competency-based applied learning that contributes to the academic knowledge, higher-order reasoning and problem-solving skills,
iv. Providing work attitudes, general employability skills, technical skills, and occupation-specific skills, and knowledge of all aspects of an industry, including entrepreneurship.
v. Tackling the societal challenges by helping them to adapt to the ever-changing environment they live in through the acquisition of relevant knowledge, attitudes, values and practical skills.
vi. Creating awareness in Nigerians that the world has become a global village where ideas, values, goods, services, people and their way of life can move across international borders easily through improvement in Information, communication and Technology (ICT) and migration.

Activities in Mathematics and Vocational education that Uphold National Unity in Nigeria

- **Conference**: Conference is a forum where organizations gather to discuss issues concerning promotion and development of the nation in the aspect of education, politics, religion etc. It is a symposium or a convention where people gather annually or bi-annually to share views and ideas for the progress of a particular organization or institution. For instance, Mathematics Association of Nigeria, (MAN) organizes a conference annually. The annual MAN conference is for all mathematics educators and mathematical scientists in Nigeria regardless of one's state of origin, the ethnic group or religion. Despite the crisis experiences in Nigeria, the conference holds annually and the venue for the conference remains rotational. During the conference, there is unity and peaceful co-existent among citizen of different group in Nigeria. They share opinions, views and ideas for the progress of mathematics education in Nigeria as one nation.

As well, the Nigerian Vocational Association and Nigerian Association of Business Educators (NABE) have their annual conference for educators in the major Vocational education programmes such teachers in; Agricultural Science, Business education, Home Economics, Fine and Applied Arts etc. Membership of the associations is open to all qualified Vocational teacher educators in Nigerian regardless of ethnic or religious identity. These associations have contributed enormously to the professional growth and unity among Nigerians through its annual national conferences.

- National Examinations

- Seminar/workshops
- National Competitions and Awards

Conclusion and Recommendations

The need for national unity in Nigeria as a federation is to balance the diverse interest in order to take care of diverse and conflicting interest of the different ethnic groups. It is quiet unfortunate that the issue of national unity has been lingered to a ridiculous limit. But definitely through education in general, the day will come when Nigerians will be a united, free and egalitarian society for all citizens irrespective of state, ethnic, race, sex, religion and status. That will certainly be the golden era we all seek for; but for now, there is the need for mathematics and vocational education in Nigeria. Based on this fact, the following recommendations are made:

1. Mathematics and vocational educators should be consulted in decision making in Nigeria because they are problem solvers.
2. Mathematics and vocational educators should be consulted for providing an equitable formula for the distribution of socio-economic services, amenities and infrastructural facilities; providing the modalities and format for equalizing imbalances and ensuring equitable treatment for all Nigerian citizen in all ramifications.
3. Nigeria government should encourage the professional bodies in mathematics and vocational education as they uphold national unity through conferences, seminars, competitions etc.
4. Nigerians should see themselves as belonging to one indivisible country, where thou tribes and tongue may differ, but in brotherhood we stand. The reign of justice, equity, fairness and respect for the rule of law and the rights of all citizens will go a long way in guaranteeing true national unity in Nigeria.
5. Nigeria government should employ mathematics and vocational education to train manpower in different occupations such teachers, applied electricity, auto-mechanics, book-keeping & accounting, building construction, computer education, electronics, clothing and textiles, food and nutrition, home management, metal work, technical drawing, woodwork etc.
6. An ‘idle mind’, they say, ‘is the devil’s workshop’. Therefore the government should also provide enabling environment through infrastructural development for foreign investors so that majority of the youths can be employed and be off the streets.

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