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CULTURAL EDUCATION: A STRATEGY FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the Nigerian rich cultural heritage with its potential for promoting honesty, hard work and national development. The paper decries the present practice among the citizens in discarding their culture in preference for alien cultural practices. Furthermore, the authors traced the nation's inability to develop and grow economically and industrially to elements of these strange cultural practices that are alien to their way of life and recommended that for the nation to progress and indeed develop, a concerted effort should be made to introduce cultural education as a subject into the curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is one of the most diversified nations in the world. It is estimated that the country has over two hundred and fifty ethnic groups. The country is also characterized by diverse climate, vegetation, topography, and agricultural practices among others. Expectedly, these diversities reflect in practices, value systems and beliefs which translate into diverse cultural practices. Consequently, the country is made up of many nationalities; A nation that historically showcase varieties of rich cultural heritage in food, music, dresses, drama, poetry, religion and language. Our forbearers understood these diversities clearly and thus sang in the national anthem "though tribe and tongue may differ, in brotherhood we stand". A prompt and early reminder that though we may be different in so many ways, we remain as one committed to one nation.

Culture denotes different meanings to different people. However, the Longman New Dictionary of Contemporary English, (2009) defines culture as the beliefs, way of life, art and customs that are shared and accepted by people in a particular society. Biobaku (1982), opines that culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief and moral, law, custom and any other abilities acquired by man. It encompasses those conventional understanding and practices which give a people their uniqueness and thus render such a people distinct from all others.

Omo-Ojugo, Ibhafidon and Otote (2009), regret that these cultural diversities have not been positively harnessed for national development, rather to a large extent these rich and cherished cultural values have witnessed cultural super-imposition. With the exception of a very few, most Nigerians now think and act as the white man. Nigerians have been assimilated culturally into western culture. The manifestations of these are seen in their dresses, music, food, language, religion, value system and in so many other ways. The cultural transmission of this alien culture permeates every aspect of their lives

A
That the Nigerian cultural heritage has witnessed a serious decay is no longer news. The Nigerian cultural heritage has been supplanted by foreign and alien cultural practices in virtually every aspect of life. The question now is how did the country get to this point?

The late musical maestro Fela, in his hit track "Folofolo" sang;

*My brother make you no follow book oh
make you look am go your way*

Education is a powerful instrument. The Whiteman came and gave western education. It was embraced without any serious reservations and questions. According to Babs Fafumwa (1976), those that were exposed to this form of education became alienated to their culture. They ate, spoke, sang, danced, and did virtually everything the Whiteman's way. This is considered to have been a big mistake and contributed to the cultural decadence in the country. This is because; as more and more of the citizens acquired western education they became alienated to the culture. One will argue whether other countries of the world (such as the Asians) did not embrace western education. They did, but with some reservations. For instance, the orient world consciously did not supplant their language with English or French. They ensured that their cultural practices were preserved. Today countries in that part of the world have their religion, music, arts, language, drama etc intact and highly appreciated by her citizens.

Another important cause of cultural decadence in Nigeria is the uncontrolled exposure of the people to western cultures even before the advent of the internet, a technological innovation through which citizens have unfettered access to western music, drama, films, food and goods including "the ugly and the bad". In addition to this is the fact that people who practise and display the western culture are seen and regarded as civilized citizens. This has triggered off an uncontrollable thirst for western culture. The result is that today Nigeria is now an appendage of Europe and America culturally.

The political elites practised and displayed western civilization and cultures; the followers who look unto them for leadership and direction have no option but to imitate them. Thus, internalizing the belief that if a product is not from Europe, United States of America, Japan or outside the country, it is inferior and not good enough for consumption. Today it has become fashionable in Nigeria to speak the English or French language, consume foreign goods (including food and dressing), practise foreign religion (Christianity and Islam), watch foreign films, and dance to foreign music as against local ones.

Can it then be said that everything about Nigerian culture is really bad? Must we throw away the baby and the water? To most people outside the shores of this country, Nigerian culture is indeed something to be cherished. Take for instance the beautiful songs and dances, the wonderful, entertaining and educative dramas that have won fame worldwide, the beautiful and flowing dresses that have become the envy of most foreigners, just to mention a few. An appraisal of the salutation scene (greeting) of the average Hausa, Ibos or Yorubas and indeed any Nigerian ethnic group portrays a scene to behold and cherish. The greeting process goes beyond the mere wishes of a good morning, afternoon or evening. It is deep-rooted and radiates love. It flows from the inner recess of the two parties involved. Furthermore, it seeks after the well-being of relations, friends and well-wishers. It is not a formality but a ritual that must be performed with civility, courtesy, respect and ceremony. Through the greeting process, one immediately recognizes the elder(s) among them.

Nigerians, it would appear have exchanged their cultures which encapsulate such values as respect for elders and constituted authority, excellence, hard work, communal cooperativeness, honesty, truthfulness, fairness, high moral standard, and good name among others for other cultures which do not place much

premium on African value systems. Cultures that tend to encourage greed, avarice, selfishness, subservience, 'I before others' and a host of other foreign practices which offend the typical Nigerian psych.

Western culture in the name of modernization, urbanization, civilization and fashion has brought a lot of changes in the Nigerian cultural scene. For instance the mode of dressing of the youths is one of such changes that insult the collective psych of the average Nigerian. In the name of fashion, many Nigerians especially the youths virtually walk the streets naked with little or no concerted efforts being made to arrest the ugly trend. Equally offensive to those that cherish the beautiful culture of Nigeria is the cultural mindset of the youths that everything Nigeria is not good, it is inferior and primitive, unless it is from outside the shores of the country. Today, Nigerians are better Christians and Muslims than the white man who introduced Christianity to them. Most Nigerians speak the white man's language better than their mother tongue.

The cultural practices with its values have been jettisoned by many Nigerians. Time it was that one misplaces ones belongings and then comes back and meets it. Time it was that you get the truth from fellow citizens even without swearing to any deity but today political office holders swear by the holy Bible and the holy Koran yet go ahead and steal billions of naira belonging to the state and walk the streets as if nothing has happened. No wonder a friend of mine once suggested that Nigerians should make political office holders to swear to their deity before assumption of office. This, according to him, could stem the tide of public treasury looting in the land.

The question that needs to be answered now is where did this cultural assault begin? Walter Rodney (1976), in his powerful prose titled 'How Europe Underdeveloped Africa' x-rayed the economic exploitation of the continent of Africa. Unfortunately, the African continent did not do much to challenge the situation and the economic exploitation has been widened to include cultural assault and annihilation: an issue that the famous Nigerian author, Chinua Achebe wrote in his equally famous novel 'Things Fall Apart'. In that novel he noted that the

Whiteman was very crafty, he came and put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart

Today the Nigeria cultural heritage is in tatters. It is in ruins. It has been assaulted and torn apart.

Nigerians and ethical practices

It has been argued that the cultural decadence in Nigeria may indeed be one of the major reasons for the many unethical practices that permeate the country. Nduka (2004), in a key note address to the Nigerian academy of education observed that

Nigerians exhibit deplorable ethical attitudes in virtually every aspect of our life. Scrambling and riotous behaviour at public places, recklessness and lack of courtesy on our roads, lack of respect for law and order, avarice and greed, excessive materialism, cheating and exploitation, misappropriation and embezzlement of public funds, electoral frauds, to mention but a few which 'hitherto were alien to Nigerians have now become our trade mark'.

All these, no doubt are the causes of Nigeria's inability to develop. For without any doubt whatsoever, these factors are inimical to growth and development. It is true that cultural values are not genetically transmitted rather it is the duty of the school to systematically transmit the societal culture from one generation to another. We should look on to the schools in this direction for according to Nduka (2004),

though our value system, has reached a crises proportion, it is the firm belief of the Nigerian Academy of Education, that the best hope of rescuing ourselves from ethical shipwreck and enabling the Nigerian developmental ship of state sail smoothly and confidently on the high seas is a revamped system of education.

This is moreso, when one considers education in the words of Babalola (2007), as an aspect of national development in which liberation of the human potentials formed the major focus. It is an avenue for the induction of the immature into a society's culture.

In the past, measures were put in place by the government of Nigeria to create a cultural awareness. Some of these measures include annual cultural festivals, hosting of the all African festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC 77), cultural displays at national and state ceremonies, creating a Ministry of Arts and Culture among others. Another major effort was the introduction of cultural and creative Art (drawing, Handicraft, music and cultural activities) in the school system (primary to junior secondary school).

Nigeria is in the process of national re-construction. It is considered that since education is the background to a meaningful national reconstruction, it becomes imperative that such effort must necessarily begin with education. This is so, since education produces advanced scientific, technological and cultural and humanistic knowledge on the basis of which Nigeria will be transformed into a humane society that adequately satisfies not only the material needs of the people but also the moral and socio-cultural needs (National Forum for Policy Development, 2007). Secondly, since the World Education Forum in April 2000, education has been perceived as an aspect of national development in which liberation of the human potential formed the major focus. Consequently, education according to Babalola (2007), is the induction of the immature into the society's culture. It is the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and cultural values. Equally, Leester (1987), in Babalola (2007:5) stated that Education is the:

Culture which each generation gives to those who are to be its successors in order to qualify them for at least keeping up, and if possible for raising the level of improvement which has been attained

The National Policy on Education (2004), states that government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction, national cohesion; and preserving cultures. Earlier, the policy has identified the national educational goals to include the inculcation of national consciousness and national unity, the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society among others. These lofty statements of the national strategies for repositioning cultural education for national development in the national policy on education notwithstanding, the transmission of our culture has been largely ineffective. This is noticed in Nigeria youths' preference for foreign made goods, cultural practices and beliefs that if the commodity is not made in the West it is not good enough for them. Consequently, the youths who are the leaders of tomorrow shun our locally made goods, music, drama, dressing, language and other cherished values. If this trend is allowed to continue unchecked, the future of the country in the next few years may experience cultural extinction. What is the way out of this debacle? What are the strategies that must be put in place to see that the much cultural awareness and practices are attained in Nigeria?

Strategies for repositioning cultural education in Nigeria for national development

Babalola's (2007), declaration that education is the induction of the immature into the society's culture is a fact that can not be faulted. This declaration becomes more relevant when education is viewed as the transmission of culture. In line with this thinking, one cannot but agree with Nduka (2004), that the best way of rescuing ourselves from ethical shipwreck and enable the Nigerian developmental ship of state sail

smoothly and confidently is a revamped system of education. Consequently, it is the firm conviction of the authors that cultural education in Nigeria must be given all the desired attention and it must go beyond rhetoric to be effective. This is more so now that the country is experiencing a national restructuring. Presently, the school curriculum does not place much emphasis on cultural education. A critical view of the subjects that have cultural elements revealed that they are not detailed enough in both scope and content as to promote awareness not to mention its appreciation and practices. It is our belief that for education to promote cultural awareness, appreciation and practices, these subjects should be made scope widened to accommodate more cultural issues. Cultural elements in these subjects should be made both theoretical and practical. Contents should include among others, the following: historical aspects of the various Nigerian major ethnic groups, a critique of the various cultural practices of Nigeria; comparative study of the cultures of major ethnic groups in Nigeria and western cultures and finally, Increased utilization of Nigerian drama, music, language, dressing, food and made in Nigeria goods.

Furthermore, general courses and cultural practices in Nigeria should be introduced in higher institutions of learning (colleges of education, polytechnic, universities, monotronics). This course should be made compulsory for all students. Students must not only be required to take these courses but must pass it before graduating. The courses should be concerned with the objectives and content of the rich cultural heritage of the country and with special emphasis on comparative study and appreciation.

Closely related to the above, the national youth service programme should emphasise the learning and appreciation of the cultural practice of the host state. Each youth corper should be able to do a comparative study of the culture in his area of primary assignment.

In order to promote cultural values, the mode of teaching especially at the junior school level should involve the use of storytelling method. Storytelling has the additional advantage of promoting moral virtues replete in our cultures.

Finally it is the firm belief that the indigenous languages which are being relegated to the background should be revisited with a view to encouraging their usage. Nigeria should be bold enough to evolve a national language different from the English language currently in use. The choice of a national language could emanate from some of the major indigenous languages. The parameter of choice could be to identify the most widely spoken and developed indigenous language. An indigenous lingual franca developed through this process will give all Nigerians a sense of belonging as well as promote unity, all of which are essential ingredients for national development.

CONCLUSION

Attempt has been made to identify the relationship between Nigerians preference for foreign cultures and the unethical practice that are inimical to national development and growth. This ethical disorientation (greed, avarice, subservience, 'I before others', etc.) was seen to have contributed to the slow pace of development in the country. Consequently, it was suggested that for the country to develop and in fact avoid a national shipwreck, that cultural education should be energized to encourage not only awareness but also appreciation and practice.

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