
**CULTURAL VALUE ORIENTATION IN EARLY YEARS:
A PLATFORM FOR BUILDING STRONG NATION**

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Abstract

Various efforts, most of which focused on the youths and older citizens, have been devoted to ensuring sustainable nation-building in Nigeria in the past. Despite this, not much has been achieved in terms of building Nigeria sustainably. This is a signal that attention needs to be diverted to other areas. One of such areas is the early years. There is the need to give committed efforts of nation-building to equipping children in the early years with values that are culture-bond and which can equip them for the task of building a sustainable nation. Values are the core of culture which serve as a guiding principle to human behaviour and actions and they bring about a sustainable society. Every nation has a distinct culture with the associated values which they seek to communicate to children during the early years to equip them with what is needed to build a strong and sustainable nation. This paper, therefore, discusses the current state of nation-building in Nigeria pointing out its attendant challenges. The paper

elucidates on early years as the period during which cultural value orientation can be used to equip young children with the skills and ideas needed for building a sustainable Nigerian nation. Recommendations made include designing a programme which schools can employ to engage young children in value orientation activities, making early years instructional contents emphasise the harmless cultural values of the nation and emphasizing cultural values orientation through the use of indigenous folklore.

Key words: *Nation-building, Values, Cultural value orientation, Early years*

Introduction

One of the ways by which a nation has been described is that it is composed of a community of people united by common ties or characteristics of speaking a common language, sharing the same culture, religion, history, inhabiting a part of state or territory, and united by common descent. Almond (2014), sees a nation to simply refers to “a group of people with a common identity. According to Gauba (2003), a nation in the modern sense implies “a set of people living in a defined territory, inspired by a sense of unity, common political aspirations, common interests, common history and common destiny though they may belong to different nationalities. In his own contribution, Dankaro (2018) says a nation comprises of diverse peoples, or even when it is made of one set of people in terms of culture, language and religion there are always individual differences. The fact that a nation comprises diverse people speaks volume about the need to keep all them together in unity, hence, the need for nation-building.

Nigeria, among the nation of the world, has a unique nature consisting of people from diverse ethnic, culture, religious background. Nigeria as a nation is characterized by an acute ethnic pluralism. Asaju and Egberi (2015) call Nigeria a federation of many different nations with different religious, ethnic, and cultural diversities of the federating units no doubt makes it a unique one.

She is one of the most ethnically diverse nations of the world. Her numerous ethnic groups speak several distinct and related languages. There are about 374 ethnic groups in Nigeria and the groups are divided into two; the majority and the minority ethnic group (Mustapha 2007). These diversities necessitated the need for nation-building. Almond (2014) captures the essence of nation-building in a multiethnic and multi-cultural state like Nigeria as a way of trying to create ethno-cultural unity. Although it has been observed that the diversity in Nigeria is linked with strengths, these strengths have however not been without its attendance challenges. Some of the challenges as identified by different authors include fear and suspicion of domination of one state or ethnic group by another, political, economic imbalances and feeling of being marginalized (Asaju & Egberi 2015). Others are lack of consent to amalgamation, the tendency to perpetual political domination by persons from one region, economic dependency or exploitation of the resources of one region and recent separatist moves which have happened at one time or the other (Ahmed-Gamgum 2014). Nweke and Nwoye (2015) also mentioned a lack of true oneness (divisions) among the people. Aminu, Charles, and Paul (2012) see lack of full practice of federalism in Nigeria as stipulated in the 1999 Constitution as another challenge of the nation Nigeria.

These identified challenges have always distressed the ship of the unity of Nigeria as a nation. To overcome these challenges, the government has been taking steps. Different strategies have been employed to keep Nigeria together as one nation. Some of these include the introduction of National Youth Service Corps, Principle of Federal Character, National Symbols, Unity Schools, National Language Policy, National Festivals Arts and Culture, National Sports Festival and National Football League. Falode (2019) attests to it that Nigeria has expended considerable energy into the project of turning itself into a viable and functional nation since independence in 1960 and that the different rulers have deployed various initiatives, programmes and measures to resolve what is now known as the Nigerian Question. The same author, however, confirmed that all these efforts have failed.

There are pieces of evidence that these and many other strategies have not been able to achieve much in the process of building the nation of Nigeria. For instance, Asaju & Egberi (2015) reported that the aim of building a virile and united nation has not been achieved through the principle of federal character. Also, most of the efforts directed towards nation-building have contributed more to conflict than the intended integration as there may be differences in accepting the proposed policies (Ubaku, Anyikwa & Emeh 2013). Nweke and Nwoye (2015) in their opinion believe that the quota system that was introduced to allow every group of people that make up Nigeria to be represented in the governance of the country to avoid marginalization rather further torn Nigeria apart than building it. This is because it has instituted mediocrity in Nigerian institutions as qualified persons are displaced by unqualified ones just to maintain the so-called peace and stability in the country.

One important thing that should be noted about the various strategies employed in building the nation of Nigeria is that they are youth and adult-oriented. These strategies did have their way of contributing to building a virile Nigeria but they equally have their share of crisis which most times nullify their strengths. Mandela Institute for Development Studies (MINDS) (2011) attest to it that several national youth service programs in Africa generally have had a fair share of challenges and criticism over forced participation, corruption, a militarisation of citizens, production of militia and a waste of resources.

The inability of some of the previous efforts of the government to produce the desired result in the area of nation-building suggests the need to shift attention to children in their early years. However, men and women of integrity and great value are needed to build a great nation, this necessitates the need to expose children to values that are cultural and harmless to get them prepared for the task of building a nation following the dream of the nation's founding fathers. The purpose of this paper therefore is to discuss how inculcating culturally relevant values in children in the early years can help to build a great nation. It focuses on the role of cultural values orientation in nation-building in children in their early years because of the peculiarity of these years of life. The paper then

considered the concept of nation-building, values and cultural values, cultural values orientation in early years, and the place of cultural values orientation in early years and nation-building.

Nation-building as a Concept

The term, nation-building to a developing nation such as Nigeria with diverse people could be the efforts geared towards knitting the different ethnic, political, cultural and religious nationalities together as a nation and ensuring every group of people that make up Nigeria is represented in the governance of the country to avoid marginalization. Nation-building has attracted different meaning from different authors in line with their political and economic understanding of the concept. Alesina, Reich and Bocconi (2015) describe nation-building as a process which leads to the formation of countries in which the citizens feel a sufficient amount of commonality of interests, goals and preferences so that they do not wish to separate from each other. Elaigwu (2004) express it as the process of creating unity and a sense of belonging among heterogeneous groups in the state. As submitted in Wikipedia (2013), it refers to the process of constructing a national identity using the power of the state. It further stated that it involves the process aimed at unification of the people within the state so that it remains politically stable and viable in the long run. Gambari (2008) sees nation-building as about building the tangible and intangible threads that hold a political entity together and gives it a sense of purpose. Dinnen (2006) describes nation-building as a process through which a country achieves a mature level of political status so that it becomes a committed state to uphold the welfare of its citizens and effective government in charge of the integrity of the boundary of the nation and a responsible member of the world community of nations. In further attempt to give a vivid description of nation-building, Dankaro (2018) identifies two categories of ideas or theories that could determine the meaning of nation-building which include: exogenous perspective and endogenous school or developmental theorist. The exogenous theory is also known as international relations school view nation-building as the activity undertaken by external actors to build or rebuild the institutions of a weaker, post-

conflict or failed states while the endogenous school or developmental theorist see nation-building as the efforts of newly independent states, and the developing countries, notably those from Africa, Asia, Latin, America, and the Balkans in achieving political stability and economic development within their domains. It can then be summarized that nation-building involves all the significant steps or modalities undertaken by both external or internal factors towards achieving national integration, national development, political development and economic stability for the citizens.

Values and Cultural Values

Values are one of the necessary ingredients to produce the desired citizen. They are determinants of what is good and bad. They give meaning and strength to a person's character by occupying a central place in his life. They reflect one's personal attitude and judgment, decisions and choice, behaviour and relationships, dream and vision. They influence thought, feeling and actions. They are the guiding principles of life which are conducive to all-round development. They give direction and firmness to life and bring joy, satisfaction, quality and peace of life. Values are the criteria people use in assessing their daily lives, arranging their priorities, measuring their pleasures and pains and choosing between alternative courses of action. Olowe and Oduolowu (2017) refer to value in another way as core societal values and they note that they are moral standards and beliefs that guide people's decision making, life goals and modes of behaviour. According to Njoku (2015), value implies acceptable standards, the ideal way of doing things and living a virtuous life in society. Jassi (2015) describes values as a set of principles and standard of behaviour which are desirable or good. Values account for the stability of the social order in the society, they provide the general guidelines for conduct. Okpilike (2012) referred to value as the aspect of cultural practices, actions or objects that are held in high esteem in the society. Menon (2012) summarises that values are the highest quality of reality and cultivate points of significance for mankind.

Cultural values represent the implicitly or explicitly shared abstract ideas about what is good, right, and desirable in a society

(Williams, 1968). Cultural values are those collective conceptions of things that are considered good, desirable and proper in a people's culture (Schaefer, 2003). These cultural values (e.g. freedom, prosperity, security) are the bases for the specific norms that tell people what is appropriate in various situations. The ways that societal institutions (e.g. the family, education, economic, political, religious systems) function, their goals and their modes of operation, express cultural value priorities. According to Makagiansar (nd), values and, by extension, cultural values denote the broader standards of a shared symbolic system of behavioural orientations and expressions, which, thus conceived, serve to integrate as well as to guide and channel the organized activities of the members of society. Cultural values are so cherished to the extent that society wants them not only to be preserved but wants them transmitted from one generation to another. The process of achieving could be referred to as a cultural value orientation.

Cultural Value Orientation

Cultural value orientation in this context refers to the conscious efforts made towards inculcating in children the harmless values that are accepted and practised in their cultural environment to behave in a culturally acceptable manner. According to Rao (2003), value orientation is the process of directing the interest and passion of individuals to the desired socio-cultural values that promote social development and good human relations. Values orientation means inculcating in the children humanism, a deep concern for the wellbeing of others and the nation. The process of involving the principles of right or wrong that are accepted by an individual or a social group is called value orientation. Value orientations represent the choices of an individual regarding the value pluralities that are grouped in organized and generalized categories and influence the person at an attitudinal and behavioural level (Jassi, 2015).

Cultural value orientations according to Schwartz (2008) find expression in the norms, practices, and institutions of a society. The orientations help to shape the contingencies to which people must adapt in their daily lives. They help to determine the individual behaviours, attitudes, and value preferences that are likely to be

viewed as more or less legitimate in common social contexts, to be encouraged or discouraged. It represents the basic and core beliefs of culture; these basic beliefs deal with human's relationships with one another and with their world. The cultural values, therefore, represent the most basic and core beliefs of a society.

The essence of value orientation is similar to what Nweneorisi (nd) and Njoku (2015) in their works at different times termed reorientation of the value system in Nigeria. This was considered as ways of handling value-related crises and for national development in the nation. It involves conscious development of human resources through ideological appeals, planning, training, productivity and efficiency in achievements through corporate culture. The authors believed that it is a search for a national culture that would reshape national character and image. The reorientation process in the education system in Nigeria would lead to redemption and salvaging of our national character and image. It is pertinent to note however that while re-orientation might be appropriate for an adult, value orientation will equip children in the early years to grow up as responsible adults.

The Early Years and Cultural Value Orientation

Everyone in the continent of Africa and Nigeria as a nation ought to be given adequate consideration when it comes to the issue of nation-building. Nweke and Nwoye (2015) emphasise that nation-building is all about people. Children are part of the people of every nation and they have potentials to contribute positively towards nation-building if adequately prepared right from the early years. Early years are a crucial window of opportunity to inculcate in children every knowledge, skills and values essentials for living and learning. Children have wider capacities to accommodate and assimilate more information because 90% of brain development occurs at this period. It is the fastest, critical and important stage of human development that can be moulded into the desired personality (Santrock, 2007; Essa 2011). Ma-Yafit, Sverdlov, Goldhirsch, Barocas and Ron (2010) and Olowe (2019) confirm that the early years in children's development are prominent in building their personality and shaping their character. During this

period, children learn social norms and acceptable behaviour patterns; they also develop sensitivity, awareness and empathy as well as moral values and social integrity. This informs the reason for the submission of Majebi and Oduolowu (2020) that early years are the appropriate time to inculcate those values that will help the child become a responsible member of the community.

The first few years of every human life are the most favourable ones for developing the attitudes and values that form the basis of personalities. The structure of values and attitudes built in the early years is the strong and permanent roots for one's entire life. Those first values determine ethical and moral behaviours throughout life. This is why it is said that everything deeply lived, practised and felt in the early years of human development remains for the rest of one's life (Didonet, 2008). It is claimed that children are the bearers of values and norms that shape future societies that have a remarkable capacity for conserving their distinctive cultures (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). Accordingly, children may be viewed as growing plants that need nurturance, miniature adults, natural and national resources that need to be nurtured as future investments to the sustenance of a society (Essa, 1999). It becomes the responsibility of the adults to properly orientate children about harmless and acceptable cultural values. Nsamenang (2006) confirms that every culture invests in children, not as an end state but in recognition that today's adults are a product of their childhoods. He also recognised integration into society as one of the provisions for children's basic needs and initial learning from the very earliest age.

Children in the early years are at stages that provide a platform for adults' habit formation. Any habit form at the early stage tends to reflect at the later stage of one's life. If a child is to display positive character, early years are the appropriate time to inculcate those values that will help him or her achieve it. Tomorrow's adults are the products of childhood (Nsamenang, 2007). Children are still malleable at the early childhood period therefore any negative behaviour exhibited by them can be corrected or prevented when values are stressed. Not only that, Zaki (2010) sees children as a potential agent of change because they have a great tendency of

influencing adult behaviour, once they can internalize a concept he can influence the adult in his environment. They can be used as a corrective tool on an adult's negative behaviour. It thus means that whatever one desire children to portrait in the adult stage could be consciously inculcated into them during the early years.

The point made above is further strengthened as every society must pass on the values enshrined in its scriptures and philosophical texts to each generation, in order, that the spirit of its culture lives on. This is a thing that can be achieved via value orientation (Burra, 2007). Otieno (2015); Majebi (2017) affirm that there is a need for the incorporation of positive and relevant cultural aspects in education from early childhood. Moreso, values cannot be inherited, they are caught and taught. The child is not born with the knowledge and competencies with which to behave acceptably but he/she is born ready to learn. He/she possesses an inborn or natural ability to learn from what he/she sees, hears or imagines. The definite strategy and mechanism by which the child is raised into the acceptable ways of his/her societies are to teach him/her the cultural ways of their communities (Nsamenanag, 2011). This makes cultural value orientation a necessity to assist the child to imbibe practices that are valued by his/her communities. This submission is in line with the advocacy of Adetoro, (2000) that compulsory citizen enlightenment and participation in the political and social processes in the country is necessary as waiting till citizens are already grown and involved in politics before inculcating right values into them might be disastrous. Values must be inculcated in children as early as possible. This is advantageous to the smooth running of the nation-building.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2004; 2013) recognizes the importance of integrating value into the education practices of children in the early years. The government, in the nation's, National Policy of Education (5th and 6th editions) acknowledges this as the issue related to value appeared in the objectives of the policy guiding the operation of early childhood education as: Inculcate social norms (culturally relevant skills and behaviour which allows them to function effectively in their current context); Inculcate acceptable social and culturally appropriate norms, values and beliefs; Develop

a sense of cooperation and team and team spirit; and Learn a good habit.

Relevant Values at Early Years

Values are many and varied according to a particular society, culture and belief. Some authors have been able to identify those that are relevant to children in the early years. Okpilike (2012) and Olowe (2019) identify values such as honesty, humility, loyalty, hard work, truth and respect, patriotism, fairness, unity, charity, service to humanity, obedience, empathy, hospitality, patience, self-control, endurance, chastity and justice. Okpilike (2012) and Olowe (2019) however believe that these have been undermined by western education. Togetherness and communication were identified by Johansson (2009) as values peculiar to African nations. These forms an important aspect of African values, if inculcated in children, it might reduce the rate of selfishness being displayed by the current leaders. Tangwa (2011) also listed family/communal spirit, respect/care for the elderly, love of children and parenthood, collective responsibility for the upbringing of the young, modesty, love of harmony, mistrust of dangerous knowledge. Umar in Dania and Igbanibo (2016) recounted the main values to be promoted as follows: honesty, accountability, co-operation, discipline, industry, self-confidence, moral courage and respect for the rule of law and dignity of labour. It is important to note that teaching these values during the early years can help to position children better towards contributing to sustainable Nigeria nation-building.

Cultural Value Orientation in the Early Years and Nation-Building

Cultural value orientation tends to prepare individuals for participation in social life and the acceptance of social rules. Since children are the young individual undergoing a process to contribute towards the building of the nation at the adult stage, exposing them to cultural value orientation will equip them with the skills necessary to make a positive impact in the development of their nations. Nweke and Nwoye (2015) emphasise that nation-building is all about people. Ellen White implies in her words cited by Osioma (2019)

that the greatest want of the world is the want of men who can contribute meaningfully to their world sustainably. She said that the type of men that the world need are men who can neither be bought nor sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who are true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the truth, even though the heavens fall. These identifying characteristics of men indicate that the men who can bring about the effective building of their nations are men imbued with cultural values. What is implied here is that the young children of today who are equipped with the cultural values and skills of their nation during the early years are the ones that would grow to become the men that the Nigerian nation needs to facilitate its process of sustainable nation-building.

Conclusion

One of the aspirations of many nations of the world is to achieve sustainable development through a virile process of nation-building. This is because it would help the nation to become stronger and to offer equal opportunity for all. Several efforts have been put in place to achieve sustainable nation-building in Nigeria but these efforts have only yielded little or no significant result because of challenges bedevilling the process. This calls for the need to redirect attention towards considering children in the early years for the task of building the Nigerian nation in the nearest future. This paper has therefore reiterated that cultural value orientation during the early years becomes necessary to inculcate in children values that will prepare them for the task of building a strong and formidable Nigerian nation.

Way Forward

The government body that is saddled with the responsibility of designing early years instructional content should ensure that the contents taught to young children reflect and emphasise some of the harmless cultural values and practices of the immediate environment. The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) through its state organs State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) should design a programme which both public and private

schools can employ to engage in value orientation activities for young children to ensure that children imbibe the skills and attitude needed to contribute meaningfully to the sustainable building of the Nigerian nation in the nearest future.

Again, UBEC through its state organs SUBEB should give orientation to teachers on the need for and importance of reinforcing children positively when they display any socially acceptable culturally value of the nation. UBEC through its state organs SUBEB should also ensure that harmless cultural values are placed on the same pedestal with academic success to encourage young children to imbibe cultural values and skills that would help them to contribute towards nation-building in the nearest future. Teachers of young children in both public and private schools should engage children in value orientation activities by employing indigenous folklores such as stories, songs, proverbs and rhymes among others to teach socially acceptable cultural values to young children.

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