EDUCATION AND NATION BUILDING

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Preamble

I have been requested to address the subject of “education and nation building”, a topic that is somewhat germane to the current period. It is also highly elastic: it may be interpreted in more than one particular way. In one interpretation, the development of education and the building of a nation run concurrently. In this approach, the expertise of the educational specialist comes to the fore, in order to explain how more idiosyncratic types of education might maximize the potential of certain groups or elements in society who may otherwise not be served. One might otherwise explore the interplay between education and nation building, or the role which education plays in business, politics, art, social engineering, national integration, and infrastructural development.

The topic has been widely discussed by many eminent academics all over the world, including renowned historians such as Professors I. A. Akinjogbin, Obaro Ikime, Adiele Afigbo and B. O. Oloruntimehin in their inaugural lectures. Indeed, one respected Nigerian academic strongly believes that his contribution to the subject may have led to his 95-day incarceration, followed by premature retirement from his university job and his subsequent career as an evangelist. The fact that the Bassey Andah Foundation has chosen the subject for deliberation on more than one occasion should also affirm its ongoing relevance to the development of the Nigerian nation, as the integration of its diverse peoples remains, as in the United States, an important project. Perhaps this goal may indeed have influenced the former Nigerian national anthem:

Though tribe and tongue may differ,
In Brotherhood we stand,
Nigerians all, and proud to serve
Our sovereign Motherland.

I shall seek in this presentation to explore the role of education in determining the course of a nation, comment on assumptions about the relationship between education and nation building, and discuss their possible impact on each other, using Nigeria as a case study. I am delighted to focus my attention on Nigeria, the home country of Bassey Andah, where the government has stated in its *National Policy on Education* (2004), echoing the constitution: “Education is the most important instrument of change: any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an education revolution.” [1]

Introduction

To be clear about our understanding of the concepts used in this presentation, please permit me to address some of the major terms. I will take the ordinary sense of education to mean the transfer of the values, skills, attitudes and culture of one generation to another, and thus escape

the problem of defining a complex subject on which everyone seeks to claim authority. There are specialized and professional discourses on education such as those given in inaugural lectures and addresses, and there are assumptions such as those shared by parents who are eager to contribute to the understanding of the subject.

I shall describe nation building as the promotion of the health and well-being of the entire populace that constitutes a nation, whereby citizens have confidence in the state's ability to ensure equitable justice and fairness, and to protect the integrity of the people without restrictions on ethnicity, language or religion. Perhaps we should add that nation building is a common subject in public discourse and involves the process of "transferring allegiances from ethnic and sub-ethnic groups to a new political community" [2]. As political scientist Tunde Adeniran explains, the process of nation building requires both a state of mind and a sustained consciousness to act on the belief that one's primary duty and loyalty should be to the nation state. The end-product of nation building would thus be the production of a people occupying a political space, welded together in their actions and thoughts and engaged in such a way that the elite and the masses are linked, while the culture is reconstructed to limit the impact of heterogeneity [3].

It is important to address the assumption that there is in fact a relationship between education and nation building. For one thing, we know that education has proved effective in assisting nations to develop the human resources with which to execute their national development programmes.

Education involves the acquisition of knowledge, and so it has tremendous value for individuals, empowering and aiding them in their quest for social and political mobility. Its utility for nations is equally important because it helps them to progress, and provides the human resources and skills required to move forward. It is therefore clear that no one can do without education, for it grants a people access to knowledge and teaches them how to correctly apply their wisdom.

Education is a potent ingredient, for example, in the production of technocrats. It also helps to transmit the values and attitudes acceptable to a society. Philosophers such as Plato made the case for the role of education in nation building in ancient Greece, suggesting that the higher the quality of investment in education the more efficient governance would be. This was in the era of the philosopher kings, when the educated were expected to play a dominant role in governance.

Otto von Bismarck, who welded the Prussian North and the Bavarian South in 1871 to make modern Germany, was reputed to have used education to build the young nation and turn it into a powerful country. To this end, Bismarck expanded educational facilities, supported innovation in curriculum development, and standardized the instruments of measurement and assessment. His aim was the integration of the various peoples of the new country, including both the powerful Protestant Prussia and the equally powerful but Catholic Bavaria. For the newly acquired province of Alsace-Lorraine, which had been annexed from France, Bismarck sent German nationals to settle, using German as the official language to displace French. Bismarck was interested in the welfare of his people and used diplomacy and education as instruments to build the nation.

Similar cases have been recorded in European countries such as Italy and France, and in important technologically developed countries such as the United States, Japan and the former

Soviet Union. We must be reminded that the United Nations Charter emphasized the role of education in nation building, and that UNESCO was established as a specialized agency of the United Nations to promote education, science and culture globally. From 3 to 12 December 1962, UNESCO convened a meeting on the subject of developing higher education in Africa, where it was concluded:

African institutions of higher learning have the duty of acting as instruments for the consolidation of national unity. This they can do by resolutely opposing the efforts of tribalism and encouraging exchanges, and by throwing open the university to all students who show capacity to benefit from a university education of internationally acceptable academic standards, and by resolutely ignoring ethnic or tribal origins and political and religious discrimination. [4]

We must, of course, recognize the constraints of using education in nation building and the possibility of its abuse. In this respect, some have chosen to label certain forms of education good and others bad. When efforts are made to use education for the promotion of social justice and equity, one then talks of good education, as Ellen G. White, one of the founders of the Adventist faith, did in her book *Education*, published in 1903. The ideal aim of education is that it prepares an individual and the larger society for harmonious development.

There have, however, been many occasions in which education has been abused, where it has been used for indoctrination and brainwashing. The case of Nazi Germany comes readily to mind, where youths were mobilized through what was perceived as education to arrogate to themselves a superiority that even angels would have denounced. In response, the countries of the Allied Powers, including Britain and colonial Nigeria, embarked on what could be described as a programme of propaganda, preparing songs of abuse and disparagement, sometimes also containing curses, and exploiting the war fever to promote hatred of Hitler. Thus Hitler was denounced as a despot who deserved death – for example, in the song "Hitila,afori aiye,ko bnimo ri, k'omoyi omo(Hitler, the scatter brain has respect neither for families nor values). In Nigeria, it has not always been a case of good or bad education but one which was originally designed to serve smaller units of the geographical space that would eventually constitute the nation of Nigeria. The thesis is often put forward that a major hurdle to nation building was the incursion of external forces, especially Islam and Christianity, as well as colonialism, which terminated the building of the Caliphate in the North and the Yoruba Empire in the South. However, it is necessary to point out the fact that, even before the arrival of these external pressures and interest groups, the indigenous systems of education posed their own problems, which we shall now explore.

The intervention of African indigenous education in nation building

It is important to note that the concept and practice of nation building is by no means a novelty in Africa, as the indigenous society had always used education as a tool for development. Indigenous education provided for the full development of the individual and the community. It was also holistic: it was not compartmentalized into different subjects and levels of education; rather, it was integrated, ensuring that learning and practice went along with theory, as demonstrated by the apprenticeship system. The curriculum was comprehensive, embracing governance, medicine, herbalism, health care, politics, philosophy, economics, accountancy, trade, marketing, planning, agriculture and soil science.

Although some descriptions of indigenous education are exaggerated, there is some truth in its potential to build character, inculcate values and positive attitudes, and develop good leadership, encouraging community spirit and consideration for the welfare of fellow members of the community. Thus, James Majasan, a leading African educationist, has observed that traditional schooling in Africa aimed to produce the *omoluwabi*, a well-brought-up, balanced, truly cultivated person – the product of a seasoned education [5]. The indigenous system prepared every member of the community to promote and defend the values and integrity of the state. Religion was central to the training of individuals, and age groups ensured that learning was inclusive, as every member of society was catered for.

The impact of the indigenous educational system was decisive. The products were peace loving, honest, contented, truthful, hard working and patriotic. By contrast, products of the mission schools founded in Abeokuta, Lagos and Abeokuta, where missionaries we allowed to practice in the early years, were described as war-mongers, dismantlers of traditional authority [6]. Indigenous education was, however, defective, as the concept of the nation was limited to the immediate neighbourhood. For Africa, one of the major problems was that education was not sufficiently equipped to cope with large areas, such as those that make up countries such as Nigeria. Leaders in traditional society were also resistant to change and were committed to preserving the traditional systems and practices, which they were prepared to defend to the death if need be. These Nigerians have been described as patriots, and have served as a source of inspiration to modern nationalists, who see the bigger picture and embrace diversity.

A major problem posed for the new Nigerian nation state was thus the existence of what has been described as “myriads of groups, some of which spoke variants of the same language and possessed certain common or similar cultural traits” [7]. This commonality did not translate into shared political action. It is this factor that leads Obaro Ikime to observe that it did not make sense to speak of tribes, but rather socio-political units.

For the traditional leaders, one’s neighbour was a stranger, an outsider. Thus, in spite of all the education offered by the indigenous educational system to the Ijebu, for them the Ibadan “were more than incorrigible war-mongers, […] they were as well ‘world spoilers’” [8]. This conception was partly responsible for the Yoruba wars of the nineteenth century, which produced “permanent refugees” all over Yorubaland. The British, who were eager to teach the opposing Ijebu a lesson and expand their imperial rule, “saw the internal division among the Yoruba peoples as godsend for a pursuit of the policy of *divide et impera*”. Thus the British, working with the Christian missionaries in Abeokuta, gave the Egba assistance against the Ijebu. The military expedition mounted against Ijebuland in 1892 included "Hausas and Ibadans" under the command of the British commanding officer, Colonel Francis C. Scott. The Ibadans were noted to be in good spirit as they joined the British to liquidate their bitter enemies the Ijebu, and were fascinated by “the lethal efficacy of the maxim gun for the first time being used in a major West African expedition” [9].

Indigenous education further posed a problem to modern conceptions of nation building. Its lack of literacy and written culture and its dependence on orality soon exposed its limitations, as it had to compete with the written records of other systems. Linked to this was its failure to produce modern weapons of warfare. The consequence of these failings was that in Ijebuland, as in other parts of Africa which faced European imperialism in the nineteenth century, the land was smashed by British maxims and seven-pounders.

What Nigeria inherited at amalgamation was the product of the indigenous educational system and an arrangement of small states that were never intended to become one nation nor prepared for the building of a modern Nigeria, a political project imposed by force by external powers. The subsequent conquest of the African forces further exposed the limitations of the indigenous educational system and made Western education, the education of the conquerors, attractive.

Western education and the problems of nation building

The adoption of Western education followed the subjugation of the smaller Nigerian states and their indigenous and Islamic education systems. Unlike Africa's indigenous education, Islamic education had the advantage of a written culture. Likewise established before colonialism, the Koranic schools had strong vocational components.

Islamic education, however, was also defeated by the powerful European forces, which led to the emergence of modern Nigeria, but the onset of Western education introduced its own challenges as the Muslim North resented the change [10]. Thus, the emirs and native administrations ensured that their own children were kept away from the schools, only putting forward other more socially and politically challenged children to attend school. The Muslim North suspected the schools of proselytizing for Christianity. Indeed, at the forefront of the promotion of Western education were the Christian missionaries. As Hubbard reports, "Religious opposition to government education was strong enough not only to preclude wide-scale participation, but also to spark occasional harassment of scholars and pupils who attended classes." [11]

Nation building on a vast scale was in fact one of the elements built into Western education. In some ways, this was a continuation of the traditions of the Sokoto Caliphate and the Oyo Empire. This new process was, however, different in many respects, as it involved the participation of the peoples and was championed by Christian missionaries, who laid the foundations for this development. Missionaries were generally most active in Nigeria, and their work in education and related social services such as health was assisted and later consolidated by the imposition of British colonial rule. Western education became the currency of development.

Christian missionaries were eager to produce a mass educated elite to further their evangelism. This was why primary and secondary schools were founded by the Church Missionary Society, most often with the collaboration of the indigenous society, as demonstrated by the founding of CMS grammar schools in Lagos, Abeokuta, Ijebu Ode and Ibadan, and similar church-inspired colleges and schools in Onitsha, Uzuakoli and elsewhere. As Ade Ajayi explains, this arrangement would ensure that petty states gave way to larger, more powerful units, in response to the requirements of commerce and technology [12].

Subjects offered at the new Nigerian schools included foreign languages, especially French and German. Mathematics and English were compulsory, and the study of Latin was encouraged. There has been a strong critique of the education offered during the colonial period, as it appeared to cultivate a colonial mentality in which all things African were condemned and ignored. The attention was on English history, English literature and English language, and when the range of courses was expanded it was to include subjects relevant to the British Empire. Indigenous languages and history had little space in school curriculums.

There is some evidence that in spite of colonial rule, the products of the school system in the early days of amalgamated Nigeria grew up as patriots, even if that was not the intention of the missionaries and government agencies. Anthony Enahoro says of his time at King's College, Lagos:

Already, Nigeria had come to mean something to me. […] At school we were not conscious of one another as Ibos, Hausas, Yorubas or Edos; tribe was a matter if indifference to us. There was only one community – Nigeria. I could not of course forget Onewa or Uromi, but I did not feel any greater loyalty to the Edo tribe, to which my people belong, than to Nigeria. If anything, the contrary was the case. I had not even visited Uromi for many years. Father, by now a senior civil servant, had been transferred from station to station in different parts of the country and I had spent each long holiday in a different locality – successively among Ibos, Yorubas, Urhobos, Itsekiris, Edos and so on. I belonged to all of them and yet to none, having no roots in any. I thought of myself as a Nigerian. I belonged to a new world. [13]

For the new educated elite, the nation would be much larger than that which had been conceived by the indigenous governments. The American historian and political scientist James Coleman has said that the aim of this new breed of Nigerians was to create a nation state that would equal others in the international state system. Christian missionary societies had thus sought to encourage their wards ultimately to create one or more states in the image of contemporary Europe [14].

But again, one can see the interplay of education and politics and the influence of politics and leadership on the process of nation building, as demonstrated by the situation in Northern Nigeria. According to historian James P. Hubbard, the pioneering Katsina College made little or no contribution to the development of the nation state of Nigeria, and its students and staff were prevented from interacting with schools and colleges in the South:

Katsina College graduates were only slightly "Nigerian" as of 1942. Almost none had significant experiences in Nigerian institutions, that is, institutions that included Africans from throughout Nigeria. Only a handful of Katsina College graduates had attended schools outside the Northern Provinces. Most seem not to have been to the Southern Provinces before the Second World War. [15]

This may account for Yakubu Gowon, a peace-loving, well-nurtured gentleman who nevertheless at his assumption of Nigerian head of state in 1966 announced that "since the end of July, God in his power has entrusted the responsibility of this great country of ours into the hands of yet another Northerner" [16]. Gowon, before the Nigerian Civil War of 1967–70, was as-yet unconverted and saw himself as a Northerner, not a Nigerian. It was the same educational system which had produced Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, who, before his election as the first Prime Minister of Nigeria, declared at the Nigerian Legislative Council:

Since the amalgamation of the southern and northern provinces in 1914, Nigeria has existed as one country only on paper; it is still far from being united. Nigerian unity is only a British intention for the country. [17]

It is, however, remarkable that the education provided in Southern Nigeria had also produced Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Nigeria's first Leader of the Opposition, who, even after his robust degree-level education, observed:

Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression. There are no “Nigerians” in the same sense as there are “English”, “Welsh” or “French”. The word “Nigeria” is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not. [18]

Chukwuemeka Ojukwu, a Nigerian Oxford graduate and product of King’s College, Lagos (founded in 1909 as the nation’s model secondary school), declared on becoming leader of the secessionist Biafra, many years after his graduation:

Nigeria never was and can never be a united country. The very nature of Nigeria inevitably gave rise to political power groups, goaded by sectional rather than national interests. […] The veneer of unity generated and maintained by the veiled threat implicit in an imperial presence became exposed with the coming of independence, and left Nigeria a disjointed mass. [19]

In a similar manner, the distrust of Southern Nigeria seems to have been captured by the Sardauna of Sokoto, who insisted that Nigeria was an artificial creation of the British:

Lord Lugard and his Amalgamation were far from popular amongst us at that time. There were agitations in favour of secession; we should set up on our own; we should cease to have anything more to do with the Southern people, we should take our own way. [20]

While we should concede that these remarks did not contemplate the environment in which those who made them later ound themselves, one may be tempted to state, with ample justification, that what education has to do with nation building is minimal, compared to other issues such as political circumstances, personal gains, societal pressures, security and economic resources. Indeed, it is possible to argue that education, though important for the individuals that form a society, is not sufficiently crucial as to outweigh other factors such as personal considerations and political control. To continue to expect education to perform wonders in spite of the pressures of wider society is to be living in a dream. It is imperative that all aspects of education, including its management, are carefully watched and deliberately carved as a weapon for nation building, so as to ensure maximum impact.

The challenge of educational exclusion

It is, however, also true that the very process of introducing Western education into African countries meant that the principle of unrestricted, inclusive education was replaced by limited access in which admission depended on the availability of staff and classroom space. The unequal access and patronage of Western education was to lead to the exclusion of a vast majority, leading to inequity and social injustice, somewhat at odds to the role of education in the development of the individual, community and wider world. A caring administration has a duty to address this problem. But Nigeria has been unlucky in this respect: many administrations have been frustrated and rendered helpless in their pursuit of this goal. Let us take three examples, the first being the colonial government, which proposed a massive development and welfare package following the outbreak of the Second World War.

The colonial administration introduced mass education and established literacy campaigns across the three regions. The government appointed Major Arthur John Carpenter as Mass Education Officer for the entire country, Josiah Soyemi Ogunlesi in the West, Nathan Ejiogu

in the East and Ahmadu Coomasie in the North. The idea was to make a difference in the educational development of the country and bring literacy to the population. The effort was, however, neither sustained nor taken seriously, as there were too many opposing forces, combined with a government which was reluctant to translate its educational objectives into reality and was only interested in keeping the people subjugated.

The literacy mission eventually failed. In the process, Carpenter was forced to take an early retirement and returned to the United Kingdom. Other officials found themselves incapacitated and either resigned or retired to take on other jobs. Each government had to be selective in its educational provision, and excluded segments or groups that were not considered a priority. For example, in 1946, when Carpenter proposed a mass literacy programme that would be inclusive of all segments of the Nigerian population, his colleagues protested against the strategy to link mass literacy with politics. J. G. Speer, a Colonial Education Officer, was especially critical:

It is not in the best interest of Nigeria to attempt to stimulate unwilling adults to attend literacy classes at a time when neither Government nor the Voluntary Agencies have adequate resources, in money, material or staff, to provide satisfactory schooling for all the children who want to learn. [21]

Thus, the proposal was not adopted. However, when Nigeria won independence, the more radical regional governments began to propose an inclusive education package for the peoples. To this end, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the first premier of Western Nigeria and a pioneer of educational reform, submitted: “To educate the children and enlighten the illiterate adults is to lay a solid foundation not only for future social and economic progress but also for political stability.” [22] In a similar vein, the first Minister of Education of Western Nigeria, Chief Stephen Oluwole Awokoya, who introduced free primary education for the first time in independent Nigeria, also observed that development could not take place if literacy was denied to adults:

They are the people who participate in voting for a government, producing the food, building the houses, curing the sick, cleaning the environment, making the clothes, transporting good and personnel, producing electrical energy, distributing and selling goods, operating and using the financial institutions, administering the government, adjudicating in the courts, and preserving the territorial integrity of the nation. [23]

At first, there was no uniformity in the pace of progress. For example, in Northern Nigeria there was a vigorous, well-coordinated literacy and post-literacy campaign called *Gaskiya ta fi kwabo* (Truth is worth more than a penny), which took an integrated approach to community development. In Western Nigeria, the Action Group sought to limit the neglect of the politically weak. Thus, deeply entrenched social prejudices against the poor, marginalized and voiceless were visited only periodically during election and campaign seasons. Under the new regional Minister of Education, Stephen Awokoya, a passionate case was made for the continued relevance of the mature learner. The ministry even published a new magazine, *Aworerin,* which carried fascinating stories of interest to older adults [24].

The government of Nigeria was also to proclaim, on the attainment of political independence:

In order to eliminate mass illiteracy within the shortest possible time, an intensive nation-wide mass literacy campaign will be launched as a matter of priority and as a new all-out effort on

adult literacy programmes throughout the country. The mass literacy campaign will be planned with a limited duration of ten years during which all available resources will be mobilized towards the achievement of the total eradication of illiteracy [25].

The “each one, teach one” method, in which everyone would have the social responsibility of supporting literacy programmes, was introduced by the Fafunwa-led Ministry of Education. A special conference was convened by the Executive Secretary of the Nigerian Mass Education Commission (NMEC) in Kaduna to explore the feasibility of the proposal and to work out the modalities of its adoption and practice.

Opposition to the proposals came, strangely, from members of parliament who would normally have been expected to protect the interests of their electorate, the majority of whom were adults. Speaking on the education budget in the Eastern House of Assembly in March 1954, one of the members of the legislature declared:

We have in the estimates here, 3,430 pounds to be spent on Adult Education Officers – I have not been able to see the usefulness of spending such on adult education. […] Some of these people we want to educate are already so old that they will not be of any use. […] I think that instead of spending 3,430 pounds on Adult Education Officers such money could be used to develop elementary education in backward areas, so that after some years the problem of adult education will disappear because children are educated right from childhood, the problem of illiteracy will disappear in thirty to fifty years. This would be better than spending money to educate adults who are so old already that they will not benefit by the type of education given to them under the Adult Education. [26]

In Eastern Nigeria, the regional government was firmly opposed to the active promotion of adult education. For example, it took no part in initiatives to establish literacy centres for women, and stated (in the spirit of the voluntary adult education movement of Britain) that “classes for women are started only at the request and desire of the women themselves” [27]. Furthermore, adult education organizers were not on the permanent staff of the education department but were temporary employees. Thus, the Eastern Minister of Education informed the House of Assembly in 1955 that there were no adult education officers “because priority of funds and staff must be given to primary education” [28].

Yet inclusive education is a potent weapon for nation building, strengthening integration and helping individuals to feel less inferior. As the Nuffield Foundation stated in its study of African education, “Education is inseparably linked with the deepest problems of national destiny.” [29]

Exclusion from Western education was to lead to a major imbalance in the populace and has impeded national integration and cohesion in the country.

The challenge of educational imbalance

While Western education helped to bring together many sections of the wider Nigerian geographical space to engage in dialogue and negotiation over the building of the new nation, it was also responsible for creating a gap between those who had access to it and those who did not, within regions and between rural and urban settings and other geographical areas. For example, there was a gap between Southern Nigeria, where the people had wider access to education, and Northern Nigeria, where access was limited.

For example, by 1914 there was hardly any sign of Western education in Islamic Northern Nigeria, except at some stations along the trading posts on the Niger River. The Muslim population of the North were suspicious that the Christian missions would use the schools to convert their children. They therefore remained resentful of Western education.

Frederic Lugard, representative of the British Crown during the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Protectorates of Nigeria, had consciously shielded the North from Western education during his tenure as High Commissioner in Northern Nigeria from 1900 to 1906, when he assured the emirs that Christian missions would not be allowed into their territories. As Governor-General of Nigeria from 1914 to 1919, Lugard remained a pathetic failure in educational administration, perhaps because of his own educational deficit and orientation. As Richard Olaniyan observes:

Lugard was, and in spite of the myth built around him, a man of more brawn that brain who by force of personality imposed an amalgamation that had neither depth nor foresight for the development of Nigeria in any particular direction. His flash in the pan policies were indicative of his professional training and background in the military. [30]

Unfortunately, the reforms introduced by his successors were equally unprofound in the area of education. In any case, one can hardly expect a colonialist nation to develop its colony conscientiously. The colonial administrators understandably did not spend much time addressing their aborted experiments in the North and the South or how to help the various kingdoms and ethnic groups manage the after-effect of amalgamation. Education was thus not considered a priority by the colonial administration in Nigeria. There is no reason why it should have done so.

There was little concerted effort to ensure that this trend changed during the later years of colonial rule. Thus, few new schools were established in Northern Nigeria. While governments were founding new colleges in Ibadan, Ugheli, Umuahia and elsewhere, to supplement King's College and Queen's College in Lagos and the work of the missionaries in the South, the old Katsina College kept on moving from Katsina to Kaduna before it found its resting place as Barewa College in Zaria. It must be said that the efforts to attract Western education were feeble and spasmodic, due to the fear, anxiety and deep-rooted suspicion held by the bulk of the population in the North, who felt that the new system would not meet their own needs and nor protect their own systems. The success by various administrations in confronting this problem varied. Far from amalgamation leading to the growth of education in Northern Nigeria, the contrary was the case, and very little was done during the early years to remedy the imbalance in access.

As independence approached, the Macpherson Constitution of 1951 made education a regional affair, and by 1954 each regional government developed its own educational policy and practice. The profession of hope in the power of education to effect positive change and support nation building translated into practical steps. This was why progressive national leaders in Africa such as Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah and Nigeria's Obafemi Awolowo, a disciplined nationalist and seasoned politician, invested massively in the free education programmes that put pupils into schools and offered scholarships to students to pursue post-secondary education courses all over the world.

Chief Awolowo appointed Chief Stephen Awokoya as his Minister of Education and sent him to Ghana to study the education programme delivery of Kwame Nkrumah. Awokoya returned

with a clear idea of what he wanted: to eliminate illiteracy through universal primary education and to launch a major literacy campaign. In the *Proposals for an Education Policy* presented to the West Nigeria parliament in 1952, Chief Awokoya declared that all children of school age would benefit from the universal primary education scheme, observing that "to restrict the benefits of this great social service to only the parents of pupils in Primary One would occasion great dissatisfaction among the majority of parents who contribute directly toward educational services by way of rates". The East attempted to adopt West Nigeria's approach, but it was limited by financial considerations and in-fighting in the region and the experiment collapsed. Again the mission failed as political instability took hold, with resignations, dismissals and electoral failures.

Festus Ogunlade notes that the immediate post-independence period in Nigeria also brought about healthy competition among the three regions, as the leaders – Awolowo, Azikiwe and the Sardauna of Sokoto – approached the development of education with greater seriousness. The leaders founded universities in their respective regions and supported staff training programmes for all levels of education. At the federal level, the government commissioned Eric Ashby to lead a team to explore the development of post-secondary education, and a second federal university was founded to cater for the commercial needs of the capital city of Lagos.

More positive and bold steps were taken by some of the administrations and the federal government launched the Universal Primary Education scheme in 1976. Festus Ogunlade observes that UPE led to many new schools springing up and that the impact of the scheme was more dramatic in the Northern states than in the Southern states, which had earlier experienced their own UPE scheme. By 1993, the enrolment differences between the North and the South had become less visible [31]; however, the gap persevered. For example, of the 939 students who studied at University College, Ibadan, between 1948 and 1959, only 74 were of Northern origin [32]. Similarly, only 4,068 of the 17,729 students were offered admission into universities in 1980.

We should add that the development of access to primary and secondary education was to be repeated for tertiary education with the establishment of universities, colleges of education, technical colleges and polytechnics. The Universal Basic Education programme was launched in 1999 by the Olusegun Obasanjo administration, aimed at addressing access to education. Obasanjo also revoked the suspension of the National Open University, which was given the mandate to provide open and distance learning throughout the nation for those who were unable to leave their homes or jobs for full-time study. It is important to note that federal and state governments (and more recently, private individuals and organizations) in Nigeria have been allowed to establish universities to accommodate the need for tertiary education for those excluded by limited admission. It is clear that in spite of these advances in enrolment, the available openings remain grossly inadequate, as many qualified students are still being kept out of admission, especially at the tertiary level.

Yet the founding of educational institutions would have been most helpful, as shown by the contribution of those few in the North. For example, some attention has been drawn to the role played by Katsina College, which was founded in 1921 and transformed into Kaduna College in 1938 and later into Barewa College, Zaria, in 1949. Some graduates of the college have achieved phenomenal political success. As a historian of the college has testified, "In Nigeria's Northern Region before political Independence and during Nigeria's first republic, Katsina College graduates occupied the most important political and governmental positions held by

Africans." [33] The institution is also known to have produced five presidents and heads of government in Nigeria, more than twenty governors and some of the most influential leaders of Nigeria, including the current Sultan of Sokoto.

However, a colonial official on reflection admitted that the college produced "far too few graduates" [34]. It must be further noted that there were far too few educational institutions to accommodate the needs of the people, most of whom continued to be wary of Western education.

In contrast to the situation in Northern Nigeria, the story in Southern Nigeria was dominated by educational rivalries among the Christian missions, as each sought to outpace the other in winning converts and providing human resource capital for the country. It was a time when Western education had begun to thrive and flourish in Southern Nigeria and parts of the Middle Belt of Nigeria. With the establishment of the colonial government and the opening of the interior to economic exploitation, the various denominations became obsessed with securing the best possible positions for their adherents. For example, Calabar High School, inaugurated by the Catholic mission, was conceived to match the famous Protestant institutions like Hope Waddell and Fourah Bay College. Communities also began to take an active interest in establishing schools to prepare children for the future. At the same time, there was considerable passion for the promotion of Western education in Southern Nigeria, as private individuals began to invest in education through the establishment of private educational institutions or by exploring opportunities for self-directed learning through correspondence colleges and private evening classes. It was during this period that new community secondary and grammar schools – such as the Ibadan Boys High School, founded in 1938, and Denis Memorial Grammar School, founded in Onitsha in 1925 – were established to provide access to education for the neighbourhoods.

This was also a period that produced the first set of graduates of the University of London. Thus, long before the first University College Ibadan was founded in 1948, there were already many locally produced, self-directed graduates of the University of London as far back as 1927 [35]. All of these were from Southern Nigeria (including Odukoya Ajayi, Alvan Ikoku, J. S. Ogunlesi, S. A. Banjo and A. T. O. Odunsi), further widening the gap in the educational provisions between the North and the South. Wealthy parents and Christian missions also sponsored students' higher education overseas. Western Nigeria was at the forefront of this development and as of 1930 Eastern Nigeria followed and concentrated much energy on sending students to the United States. The result was a continuing gross imbalance in the educational development of the country.

Combating the problem of educational imbalance

In spite of these efforts, education has continued to develop at a slow pace, as reflected in the low enrolment figures, the inadequate number of schools, the immobility of teachers, and the concentration of schools in urban centres in Northern Nigeria. The gap between the North and the South in in terms of access to education has thus widened as more private tertiary institutions have been established in the South to cater for the admission of qualified candidates.

By 1966, the military incursion into governance had begun and the instability in the country led to civil war, which raged for three years. The question of imbalance in education between the North and the South was identified as one of the reasons for the tension in the process of

nation building and the continued imbalance in educational access between the North and the South was likely to further unsettle the healthy co-existence of the various peoples of the country.

In an attempt to confront the challenge and resolve the issue, a proposal was made to introduce a quota system, in which admissions to federal educational institutions at all levels would be based on states of origin. The youthful head of state, General Yakubu Gowon, who had just successfully concluded the civil war, was not enthusiastic about adopting a system of admission which would give minimal consideration to merit and competence. While he was conscious of the need for equitable distribution of admission based on a formula of merit and geographical consideration, he believed that "a long-term sustainable approach to overcome the educational imbalance was not through a quota system of admission but through strengthening primary and secondary education in the affected states of the North" [36]. He promised in an address delivered in 1972 at Ahmadu Bello University that he would settle once and for all the question of educational imbalance

It has been frequently said that General Gowon, whose surname was expanded to read "Go On With One Nigeria", genuinely believed that education could be used to weld the nation together. We know that, to that end, he attempted to use non-formal and out-of-school educational approaches as a platform for nation building.

Thus, after the tragic civil war and as part of his programmes of reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction, he introduced the National Youth Service Corps to encourage Nigerian youths to learn to live together as they grew up in the country. His administration also began to build federal unity schools and colleges in the hope that if young people lived together and shared a common experience, some integration would take place.

It was, however, the succeeding administrations that reopened the question of quota-based admission. Thus, in September 1981, the Federal Ministry of Education issued guidelines directing the Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board (JAMB) to introduce a quota system for universities.

Under this arrangement, 40 percent of admission was reserved for students based on their scores in the JAMB examinations, leaving 20 percent for educationally disadvantaged states, 30 percent for the catchment area and 10 percent at the discretion of the university authorities. The idea was to assist students from states where enrolment was consistently low so that they can be sent back to their states of origin to help in their development. This system of admission meant that candidates with higher scores in one state were dropped in preference of students with lower scores in another.

The adoption of the quota system, however, came under serious criticism. It was pointed out that it was introduced by the President known as "a president from the North"

who was interested in halting the educational advance of the South" [37]. J. M. Kosemani, an articulate educationist, described the quota system of admission as an aggravated parody and a fraud on the nation, designed to kill the initiative in some areas and encourage mediocrity in others [38]. It was argued that the system had the potential to make students in privileged parts of the country lazy and resigned, possibly proud and confident, shunning the competitive spirit demanded by a growing global and competitive society. It was further argued that the system

was by no means helpful to students, as it would weaken and erode their confidence and lower their self-esteem. Thus, the quota system may prove to be counter-productive.

Furthermore, it was pointed out that those candidates who earned placements based on the quota system might tend to see themselves as products of the quota, representing the interests of their states rather than of the entire nation, paying allegiance to godfathers in their local communities who have been able to secure for them what they ordinarily would not deserve. The result would be the cultivation of statism and ethnic allegiance, which in the end would be inimical to nation building. Quota students could thus end up becoming quota professionals who will then try to duplicate themselves, injecting into the system ideas and practices which favour only their corners of the nation, moved not by national consideration but by what they can benefit from the allocation of quota-generated prestige.

Obaro Ikime has expressed some disquiet on the subject:

How do we determine the State of origin of the boys and girls who take entrance examinations? If Chukwuma, son of an Imo State father resident in Maiduguri, was born in Maiduguri and went to the same school with Jibril, also born in Maiduguri of Kanuri parents, and took the entrance examination to a Federal Government College, does he receive the same treatment as Jibril or has he to score 70% to gain entry while Jibril can get it with 45%? [39]

Ikime then warns that the nation should be careful, "lest we place obstacles in the way of our young ones developing into worthy and loyal Nigerian citizens" [40].

Emeritus Professor Ayo Bamgbose, an eminent academic, National Merit recipient and former member of the JAMB board, has publically declared his discomfort with the quota system. Similarly, another academic, J. A. Atanda, a distinguished historian and former Commissioner of Education in Oyo, has said that it is "certainly a wrong prescription for the ailment of educational imbalance". He admits that it is certainly desirable to redress the educational imbalance between the North and the South for the sake of healthy and peaceful co-existence, but warns that the quota system, as practiced, is a potential source of ill feeling among those candidates who see less qualified candidates given admission while they, the more qualified ones, are rejected. He adds that it will be difficult to convince such candidates that they are living in a country where there is fairness and equal opportunity for every citizen in the field of education. Therefore, the rationalization that the quota system would promote unity is hardly borne out in practice. The side effects are felt even in areas where quota policy statements have not been overtly made.

Atanda concludes that the education provided by the quota system has been unable to effect the transformation required for a modern Nigeria, which continues to be plagued by distrust. He adds,

In spite of our efforts and achievement in growth rate, it is sad to note that our country, Nigeria, is still far from running an educational programme that prepares the country and its citizens for self-reliance and for the task of nation-building. [41]

The danger remains that products of quota admission will in the end make minimal effort in the pursuit of excellence and will not make personal sacrifices. They will end up as counterfeit nation builders, saboteurs of the nation, used to being appointed to positions for which they do not qualify, preserving and promoting sectional interests and defending their selfish wants. Yet

the plea to his countrymen by the former President of the United States John F. Kennedy remains relevant: "Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country." Folake Solanke, the first female Senior Advocate of Nigeria and a leading jurist, made a similar recommendation, warning that "merit should never be sacrificed on the altar of federal character or zoning, otherwise mediocrity will replace excellence" [42].

There is no evidence that the prescription was well thought through before its imposition. Certainly there was little or no consultation with the wider Nigerian public before its arbitrary adoption. It will be recalled that the formative years of Western education in Nigeria brought quality schooling, in which admission was defined by the quality of the students, the availability of qualified teachers, sound curriculums and an excellent learning environment, including libraries, laboratories and recreational facilities. Selections were made without regard to gender, gender identity, marital status, sexual orientation, race, ethnic origin, colour, religion, social background, caste or disability. Recruitment of students was done through competitive examinations in which there was no other consideration other than merit. Students were also encouraged to study hard, to be dedicated and determined, to consistently learn and work hard to succeed. This was the system that produced the exceptional graduates of Katsina College.

Further prescription: Educational policy and the takeover of schools by government

It is not known how much research was done into finding solutions to the critical problems of educational development in Nigeria before the government decided to take over private and mission schools in the country. We do know, however, that there was little public debate on the issue. The incursion of the military, with its tendency towards centralization, into governance and the effects of the Nigerian Civil War and the East Central State Education Edict of 1970 (which mandated government to take over all schools in the state), paved the way for the takeover of schools from private proprietors.

But it is clear that this decision has proved inimical to the furtherance of the nation, judging by the decline in moral standards of the products of these institutions and the reduced support for education programmes. The impact has been felt in staff recruitment and training, by infrastructures including libraries and laboratories, and in the private sector's contribution to education funding and governance. It is now being suggested that the government takeover was a great error of judgement and that the influence of mission schools on character and professional formation – the inculcation of discipline, integrity, sensitivity to others and selflessness – is sorely missing [43].

1. O. Williams, General Secretary of the Christian Council of Nigeria, in a paper he presented at the council's Golden Jubilee celebrations in November 1989, observed that:

Nigeria is a great country, of which we all should be justifiably proud. Most unfortunately, within the last decade or so, God has been angry with Nigeria. I am quite clear in my mind that one of the most unforgivable sins that have been committed has been the abominable destruction of those great citadels of learning which were the sacred instruments, with which the minds of children were moulded and their character developed in such a way that they would become useful and God-fearing citizens. [44]

It is laudable that many governments in the Federal Republic of Nigeria have begun to rethink their position on the takeover and are considering returning the schools to their former proprietors. Private initiatives have also been stimulated and encouraged in education promotion at all levels since 1999.

The curriculum

Another measure taken to address the challenge of education and nation building in the country has been to review the current range of curriculums, in particular their instructive content and methods of learning. The idea is to make the nation's educational package more responsive to the needs of nation building. It will be recalled that the earliest providers were the Christian missions. For that purpose, the focus was on evangelism and the spreading of the Gospel. Students were encouraged to emulate the selflessness, sacrifice, compassion and service of Jesus Christ. As Oswald Chambers notes, "The missionary message is not patriotic. It is irrespective of nations and of individuals." [45] This goal was reflected in the school curriculum. It must be added that Christian missionaries did not just introduce a new faith, they also served as the vanguard of modernization and social transformation, pioneering major work in public health, environmental sanitation and personal hygiene, maternal health and child care, potable water supplies, agricultural practices and production, and Western education. The educational programmes of the missions have thus been helpful, as pupils and students have been taught the value of developing one's character. Encouraging the boarding system, in which learners bonded and developed lasting friendships and shared in games and extracurricular activities, the objective was to inculcate values of tolerance and understanding in the learners – to learn how to appreciate differences and have compassion for others. The students were thus trained to develop a respect for truth and live a life of honesty, to learn about the values of loyalty, dedication and commitment to principles and convictions.

During the course of their study, students learned about the sources of conflict: intolerance, exploitation, greed and selfishness. They learned how to be considerate, to exercise patience and put their differences behind them, and to make peace through love, confidence, trust and gentleness.

The students were also taught how to make the right choices and to recognize the effects of the choices they made, and to respect constituted authority, beginning with their senior students and class officers and moving on to the teachers and school heads. They were made to appreciate the value of compliance, negotiation, compromise and consensus building. They were taught how they could rise above negative attitudes and conceptions, and hurt feelings and irritations, and how to settle differences amicably without conflict. Thus, those who were diligent were rewarded with prizes and appointments as classroom monitors, house captains and school prefects. On the other hand, those that proved incorrigible and difficult were identified and punished for their antisocial behaviour.

The establishment of colonial control expanded the scope of the activities of colonial officials and introduced wider control of the curriculum. This led to the colonial government inviting British examination boards to assess the quality of learning in schools. To this end, the Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate was invited to Nigeria in 1910 [46], followed by the Oxford Delegacy for Secondary Education in 1929 [47]. The experience gathered from the work of the British examination institutions was to later assist in the eventual establishment of the West African Examinations Council.

Another aspect of the development of education that is worth considering is the National Curriculum Conference of 1969, held under the auspices of the Nigerian Educational Research Council. It was the administration of the young head of state General Gowon which initiated the process of consultation, leading to the formulation of the *National Policy on Education*. This was against the backdrop of the outbreak of civil war and its attendant crises.

Following the National Conference on Education held in 1969, a follow-up consultation was proposed in the form of a national seminar, which was to consider the formulation of a *National Policy of Education*. Chief S. O. Adebo, a respected public servant, was to serve as Chairman of the seminar, held at the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) and to be declared open by the Federal Minister of Education. The students of the university decided to block the seminar as they suspected that it was being held to "fine-tune" the proposal for the National Youth Service scheme to which they were opposed. The seminar was postponed and shifted to another venue on Victoria Island in Lagos. Its fortunes were thereafter dictated by the unrest in the country.

Perhaps if the seminar had been organized under a more conducive atmosphere, it would have offered an opportunity for dialogue with the various constituents of the country. In the event, a new system was formulated and later adopted as national policy: six years of primary education, followed by three years of junior secondary, three years of senior secondary and four years of tertiary education, known as the "6-3-3-4" system [48]. There was little discussion of the modern school system in Western Nigeria, in which brilliant students were gathered and nurtured to realize their full potential in life, or of the middle school system in Northern Nigeria, which played a key role in the development of education in the region. The attempt to introduce the 6-3-3-4 system, which was aimed at encouraging students to use their hands and develop expertise in technical subjects, did not take into account the tradition in Eastern Nigeria, where that aspect of learning was by no means new to the Igbo. As Diamond puts it, the Igbo were not satisfied with the pursuit of a literary education, only with self-improvement and self-validation, which was a universal feature of their native communities [49].

The *National Policy on Education* was not a product of a consensus of the people and some of the states of the federation resolved not to implement the policy. Again, it was the military's return to governance that compelled a uniform implementation of the policy. J. F. Ade Ajayi believed that the senior secondary curriculum did not appear to have been thought through, and that it continued to be treated like the old classes four, five and lower six, working to a revised curriculum. Ajayi added that the national policy had been formulated largely under the military regimes of the 1970s, and while education had featured briefly in the electoral campaign of 1979, the launching of the national policy generated very little public debate; the policy was therefore really only an expression of the intention of government [50].

The National Curriculum Conference also eventually led to the phasing out of history as a subject in schools, an unacceptable development to the generality of the Nigerian population. And as the President of Senegal Leopold Senghor once observed, paraphrasing Dostoevsky: a nation that refuses to keep its rendezvous with history, that does not heed its unique message, is finished – ready to be placed in a museum [51].

The exit of history from the national curriculum is tragic because there is no doubt that history instils patriotism and nationalism in the minds of citizens of any nation, and to rob a nation of the study of its history is to do great disservice to the peoples' past, present and future.

Related to the issue of the curriculum is that of the language of instruction. As examinations in Nigeria were conducted by British examination bodies, the focus was on the mastery of English. Because the curriculum was examination-oriented and European languages were taught, students were prevailed upon to study them. To help learners learn more efficiently, the use of African languages was discouraged. African languages were thus necessarily downgraded in status and labelled “vernacular”, and failure in the colonial language was failure in the whole examination, no matter how capable the student was in other subjects. What is more, students “caught” speaking African languages were made to copy the sentence “I will never speak vernacular again” over and over again. Competence in the colonial language was a top priority in schools. Western education, including the adoption of English as the means of communication, under British rule became the currency by which educational attainment was measured.

European missionaries (and, later, the colonial rulers) sought to replace the indigenous education system with one more familiar to them. The process of substitution was effectively facilitated by colonialism, which perfected the new practices by bringing in legislation and inviting European examination bodies to introduce a standard examination system. This initiative brought considerable change into the educational system and put an end to practices that one mission education secretary described as “poor”, whereby the standards were so low that neither the students nor the teachers themselves could pass government examinations [52]. It nevertheless encouraged the hegemony of the English language and hindered the building of the Nigerian nation.

We should also take note of the imperative to provide quality education in the country. Professor Olu Jegede, former Vice-Chancellor of the National Open University and later Secretary-General of the Association of African Universities, has commented extensively on the variety of the products admitted to Nigerian universities [53]. Editorials have appeared in national papers such as the Nigerian *Guardian* and *Punch* addressing the issue of education. For example, the *Punch* editorial of 22 September 2011 was boldly captioned “Revamping Nigerian Universities” and drew attention to such areas of concern as the decline in quality of graduates and staff, the lack of confidence in research and publications, and the shortfall in funding.

We must, of course, continue to appreciate the challenges posed by larger society, which seeks to limit the effectiveness and efficiency of education. As Tunde Adeniran, an academic who has been an active participant in governance and who remains a keen observer, recently concluded, we must all admit that Nigeria is presently wallowing in a crisis of nation building, compounded by greed and short-sightedness [54]. Adeniran draws attention to “the multitude of sins of our generation, our talking too much and doing very little” [55], listing poverty, gross underfunding, severe infrastructural deficit, unemployment, socio-economic ills and nepotism, and concludes that there is an absence of a national integrative vision for all leaders to defend and work towards in order to move the nation forward. Adeniran laments that “some years ago nobody, in his or her wildest imagination, could have conjured up the picture of today’s Nigeria in which the roots of our faith in the future have become so slender and the soil in which they grow is too thin to withstand the current gale” [56]. He expresses the hope that highly principled, accomplished, experienced and patriotic individuals will be available, ready to “look beyond mere positive idealism and the twin orgy and ogre of opportunism to realistic proposals and practical action in the interest of a just, united and stable tomorrow” [57].

Observations, conclusion and recommendations

In our study of education and nation building, some features have been recognized as unique to the Nigerian experience. Unlike the nations of Europe and America, Nigeria has had to work under severe pressure brought about by the subjugation of the indigenous system of education by Islam and Christianity and from the eventual capitulation of both systems to colonial rule. Education has had to respond to the challenges created by this historic situation, involving a blend of the traditional, Islamic and Western influences with the attendant implications.

We should add that from its inception in 1914, educational policy formulation has not sought consultation in taking decisions which affect the people. Thus, Nigeria does not seem to have been prepared to benefit from this process. Rather, the nation has frequently taken inappropriate and arbitrary knee-jerk measures in the use of education for nation building.

The consequence has often been confusion between policy and practice. How else would one justify the denial of equity and social justice in a country whose government has endorsed the building of a free, just and equalitarian democratic society, a strong and self-reliant nation, a great and dynamic economy, and a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens? As the same government stated in 2004: “Any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an education revolution.” [58]

There is also the misleading assumption that education is restricted to the content of instruction and to schools, a restriction that excludes educational management and the control exercised outside the domains of the school. This assumption also fails to pay attention to out-of-school and non-formal education, where learners spend little time in school *per se*.

But perhaps more serious is the assumption that education is capable of changing the course of development. For in reality, education constitutes only one of the ingredients, albeit a critical one. Education can thus not ignore other components in the infrastructure, such as politics, governance and the economy. We know that it is politics that determines the number of students to admit and the number of classrooms to be built and where, and it is politics that determines the policy that guides educational management. Nation building is a joint venture that employs all sectors of life, as enunciated by the Nigerian political scientist Tunde Adeniran:

- (i) A clear ethical, political, economic and social vision for development within a framework of static institutions;
- (ii) An ideological praxis that places people at the centre of development and toward whose needs economic and other critical activities are directed;
- (iii) The promotion of democratic ideals, social justice, human rights and dignity, non-discrimination, pluralism and solidarity among the diverse people of the nation state;
- (iv) Freedom of association, equal rights and opportunities and equitable distribution of national resources; and
- (v) A responsible leadership that is committed to policies designed to fulfil (i)–(iv) above and with the capacity to shape the future through them. [59]

Education does not operate in a vacuum; it is affected by the environment, the prevalent ideas, prejudices and attitudes to social injustice, and the attendant features of life. Education is not a neutral subject, nor is it an orphan. Education goes beyond the learning of facts and involves the training of the mind to think and reflect. Our account of the past suggests that most of the attempts to inject a new lease of life into education have been misplaced because of the failure of those responsible to understand and appreciate the challenges involved. Thus policy makers

and implementers seem to be overly concerned with only treating the symptoms of educational problems, rather than dealing with the cause.

In spite of the result-oriented education initiatives introduced over the years in Nigeria, the country's nation-building mission has frequently been derailed; ignorantly or perhaps deliberately, education has been consistently denied the opportunity to play an effective role in nation building. The few moments when a window of opportunity has presented itself, it has not been exploited and the nation has consistently missed out. Very little consultation has taken place among stakeholders.

We should make some recommendations about the way forward in this great country. Within the context of UNESCO's Education for All declarations, the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals and its recently launched Sustainable Development Goals, it is imperative that the country resumes the aborted mass literacy programmes of the past and makes education accessible to all. There can be no alternative to making the people literate. A large pool of literate people who are engaged in all aspects of the building of the Nigerian nation will usher in a new era of enlightenment, unhindered by rumour peddling and misrepresentation.

Illiteracy has left the bulk of the populace incapable of making any real and effective contribution to the building of the nation. This means that for any meaningful development to take place there has to be deliberate action to reduce the illiteracy rate. This initiative will correct the failure of the colonial governments and the post-independence administrations to take the issue seriously. Understandably, the colonial officials – who did not derive their authority from the people and so did not feel accountable to them –did not seek to empower the people through literacy. It is more difficult to understand why the Nigerian governments have failed to reduce the problem, if not to eliminate it altogether.

I would suggest that the government has a second look at the adoption of the quota system of admission. Indeed, introducing the quota system and haphazardly imposing a curriculum on the people cannot solve the problem.

1914. F. Ade Ajayi has suggested that the various revolutions and empire-building initiatives in various parts of what later became Nigeria might well have contributed to the emergence of a nation wedded by commerce, cultural ties and other historical antecedents, and that no individual or institution should seek to claim any credit for the coming together of Nigeria. Various people and individuals should, however, be commended for their efforts in making a nation out of the myriad kingdoms and states that were brought together in 1914. Unlike countries such as Japan, France, Germany and Brazil, which have a single language that make up the nation, Nigeria has had to battle with the problem of crafting one identity out of the welter of languages and cultural practices. Added to that challenge has been the problem of ignorance, abject poverty, corruption, intolerance and deceit at all levels of governance.

Related to the issue of governance is the instability in educational management arising from the frequent, often uncertain changes in governance: the country has experienced a change in constitutions, national anthems and flags, and a drastic change from a parliamentary to presidential system of government. Since 1960, there have been several changes in political leadership, which has invariably affected educational policies, programmes and practices. Tamuno and Atanda have attempted to formulate the periodization as follows: "Background to Independence", "Nigeria, 1960–1966", "Nigeria, 1966–1979" and "Nigeria, since 1 October

1979". They have also noted the changes following the military coup of 1983 and that of 1985, again to be followed by those of 1993, 1998 and post-1999. The frequency turnover of Ministers of Education has been a disturbance to stability in the administration and management of education.

It is interesting to note that neither the political leadership nor the experts and specialists in education in Nigeria have succeeded in helping the nation to explore how education can resolve the issue of nation building or indeed any aspect of the national question in Nigeria. The country has been criticized that rather than turning inwards for a solution, it has chosen to rely on outside advice from people who have little or no stake at all in what becomes of Nigeria. The nation thus ends up crafting a curriculum that expunges history from its secondary school subjects. It must have been the frustration of this failure that caused J. F. Ade Ajayi, in a tribute he paid on behalf of the Historical Society of Nigeria in October 1983 to Kenneth Dike, the pioneer Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ibadan, to lament:

We have so little consciousness of a time perspective. We act and react as if there is only today, no yesterday, no tomorrow. We seem to care a little about the past, we have no enduring heroes and we respect no precedents. Not surprisingly, we hardly ever consider what kind of a future we are building for our children and our children's children. We lack statesmen with any sense of history. Politics of the moment dominates our life, leaving no room for evaluating achievement or appreciating merit. [60]

The nation must rethink its educational priorities. The administration should cultivate partnerships with non-governmental bodies, religious organizations and individuals, and increase private ownership of educational institutions at all levels of education. To correct the government's previous errors, all schools must be urgently returned to their proprietors on the condition that staff salaries and learning environments are not negatively affected.

There should be an investigation into the reasons why, in spite of the knowledge that education is demonstrably a worthwhile investment, there has been little progress made in the country. Why was Nigeria among the countries that failed in the mass education programmes launched by UNESCO from 1944 to 1960? Why is the country, even after independence, still unable to achieve the Education for All targets and the Millennium Development Goals?

It is now time for the leadership to reflect on the arrangement of a system which fails to encourage merit and competence in determining admission to its educational institutions. The need to reduce the educational imbalance among states and regions is vital to the development of the nation. The government may wish to consider alternative strategies to addressing this imbalance, such as expanding access to less-developed areas or increasing enrolment by building more institutions and providing more staff and facilities. The focus on merit will stimulate healthy competition in society and ensure that no preferential treatment is given to any section of the Nigerian population.

We should revisit the school curriculum and bring back our history; after all, the new national anthem talks of honouring "our heroes past". But there are currently limited avenues through which to identify who those heroes are, what makes them heroes and how they became heroes. This is what history as a subject can unravel, not the growing catalogue of biographies, many of which lack historical depth and analysis.

A new education policy on the language of instruction must be developed and the possibility of a common language for the Nigerian nation must be explored. Policy makers, planners and education practitioners must be made to appreciate that education is not merely the learning of facts: it is rather the training of the mind to think. We must strive to nurse an environment that is conducive to education and will promote lifelong learning. This will give learners the freedom to meditate and reflect on issues and allow them to appreciate why the nation must be built for the totality of society.

It is important that the affairs of the nation be consistently conducted through justice, equity, democracy and transparency. Ultimately, the nation will respect decisions taken in the interest of the whole and which have been guided by the welfare and interest of every member of society, without consideration of their origin, gender, ethnicity or religious affiliation.

Finally, we must return to our basis and insist that the best aspects of indigenous education be identified and used to improve the quality of the modern education that has been imported into the country. As Bassey Andah asserts, “Our traditional and technological systems were and still remain viable systems on which we can build our future.” [61] To do this, there has to be some creativity in the design of the total package in order to make competence, commitment and character the basic foundations of the education sector. The administration must therefore lead by example and build the confidence of everyone in the nation. In the end, Nigeria should expect to reap the harvest of a people united and standing together, fully integrated, and facing the challenges of radicalization (the type that led to the Arab Springs of 2011 to 2013), poverty and unemployment, and tackling the double standards, ethnic chauvinism and religious bigotry that constitute a virus to nation building.

Acknowledgements

On 7 January 1998, the current Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ibadan, Professor Abel Idowu Olayinka, then at the Institute of Applied Geophysics at the Technical University of Berlin in Germany, first broke the news of the untimely death of Professor Bassey Wai-Ogosu Andah, then Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Administration) of the University of Ibadan and President of the World Archaeological Congress, to the wider world. The late Professor Andah immediately became a celebrity and reactions to his death came from many parts of the world, where he was hailed for his mastery of several languages, his amiable nature and his status as a world citizen. He was as much at home in Ghana as he was in Nigeria or in the United States, where he was both a student and a faculty member. Likewise, lecturers at the foundation are drawn from all parts of the world.

I must commend all those who have established the Bassey Andah Foundation. One is not surprised to find that eminent scholars such as Professor E. J. Alagoa and past and present staff of the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ibadan and the University of Calabar have remained strong supporters of the foundation, given the selfless service of Professor Andah to the universities and his commitment to the promotion of scholarship. His immediate family members led by his selfless, virtuous wife have all performed remarkably in their various chosen callings and careers. It is noteworthy that rather than choose to inherit the lovely wife of his late brother, Edem Andah has opted to vigorously protect the legacy of his brother with passion and dedication.

Bassey Andah was a man of determination, courage and perseverance. He was a confident man who firmly pursued whatever cause he believed in. He dressed smartly but was also very

simple, often in his African attire. That he changed his name from Bassey Eteyen Wai-Ogosu to Bassey Wai Andah, as a result of a dispute with his father, speaks volumes about the courage and the independent spirit of the young man [62]. He was among a crop of educated elite that helped to build the University of Ibadan's status as a leader in education in Africa. He was the best in his history class at the university and opted for the study of archaeology because of his confidence that he could excel in any subject.

I must admit that it is a great honour to be asked to give the 17th lecture. I was going to use a phrase which the late Professor J. F. Ade Ajayi frequently used throughout his life, each time he was surprised by a kind invitation to present a lecture to a treasured audience: "I do not know to what I owe this kindness and recognition." But on second thought, I began to realize that this great honour of joining the distinguished past lecturers to celebrate the memory of Professor Andah and to have the opportunity to return to Calabar – home of the historic Hope Waddell Institute and the now defunct West African People's Institute of Eyo Ita – is clearly an answer to my prayer for miracles, signs and wonders, and I hasten to join King David in one of his familiar songs: "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy Name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." [63]

Bassey Andah, who has left to wait for us in eternity by the grace of God, was my boss, a cherished role model and a beloved senior colleague and friend. He was a very special person to me, a thinker, scholar and builder of peoples and programmes. I recall during his campaign for the hotly contested seat as Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the university, I was surprised that he took the votes of younger colleagues into consideration and cultivated our friendship, visiting us in our offices. I am glad that he won the election and had an opportunity to serve the wider university community in his time.

Bassey Andah was also a builder of partnerships, one who had friends of both genders across many racial, geographical and ethnic boundaries. He was a truly educated person given to hard work, industry and dedication to the causes in which he believed. He was also sensitive to issues and peoples and respected diversity. Anyone who appreciates quality stewardship will know it was impossible to refuse any request from this selfless academic and administrator.

I am glad to have accepted the invitation to share my views on the subject of education, which has been my preoccupation for almost half a century. I want to thank the various archives, libraries and institutions that aided my research, especially the National Archives, Ibadan; the British Library, London; Jadeas Library, Ibadan; the Library of the Institute of Education of the University of London; and the Library of the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada, all of whom allowed me access to their rich collections. I would also like to thank my teacher and friend Dr G. A. Akinola, who, as usual, found time to read through this manuscript and offered me the usual guidance and encouragement.

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* Michael Omolewa, Emeritus Professor at the University of Ibadan, was President of the 32nd session of the General Conference of UNESCO.

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