Citizenship Education: A Tool for National Unity in Nigeria

[1]**Obazi Nkanu Inyang**
obaziinyang@unical.edu.ng

[1]**Christopher C. Ohanyere**
ohanyerechristopher@gmail.com
[1]*Department of Social Science Education*
Faculty of Arts and Social Science Education
University of Calabar, Calabar

Fyentirimam Dan-Asabe
Department of Physical and Health Education
Faculty of Education
Federal University, Wukari, Taraba State
danasabef@yahoo.com

Abstract
For long-term national unity and progress to be achieved, proper implementation of civic education curriculum at all levels of Nigerian education is very significant. It has been asserted that for the country to remain as one indivisible entity, every citizen should first see himself as a Nigerian before seeing himself as Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Efik, Ibibio, Ijaw, Igala, or any other ethnic or cultural group in which he may identify himself with. This means establishing a Nigeria in which the level of national consciousness among the country's populace has been raised. To build a progressive and unified society, it is necessary to produce patriotic, critical, democratic, and energetic individuals who are socially, economically, and politically accountable as well as people who share a common goal. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to examine in depth the significance of citizenship education in Nigeria; both in terms of effective citizenship and in terms of promoting peace and unity in the country. It is recommended that all Nigerian citizens should be treated fairly and equally as well as a conscious development of a feeling of oneness among Nigerians towards the attainment of national unity.
Keywords: education, citizenship, national, unity, consciousness.

Introduction

Currently, Nigeria as a nation is at a crossroads, with no clear path forward in terms of resolving the plethora of challenges the country is faced with. This is a result of the widespread inter-religious crisis, as well as inter- and intra-ethnic violence, that exist in the country as at the time of this writing. A few instances of crises include the Niger Delta situation, religious intolerance between Muslims and Christians, the desire for true federalism, the call for secession, and enmity between different ethnic groups. Successive Nigerian administrations have made some conscious efforts to promote peace and unity

in the country, but these efforts have not been very fruitful. Atiku, as reported by Eme-Uche and Okonkwo (2020) asserts that successive governments have attempted to solve the problems caused by the absence of collective identity as well as a predisposition toward primal attachments through the implementation of purposeful policies and programmes, with varying degrees of success. As an example, the Nigeria Inter-religious Council (NIREC), which was established on September 29, 1999, on behalf of the federal government and under the leadership of former Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo, was launched on that date. As at now, the co-chairs of this council are the Sultan of Sokoto, who also serves as president of the National Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), and the national president of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN).

An overarching purpose of the Council's establishment was to promote interfaith tolerance and peaceful cohabitation between the two main religions in the country, as well as promote ethical standards and good governance throughout the country. The lack of appropriate societal values, according to Olayiwola (2013), is the result of poor leadership, a lack of moral integrity, a culture of mismanagement of wealth, indiscipline, consumerism, corruption, selfishness, intolerance, and an unequal distribution of income, among other factors. In addition, it is clear from this that there is a high level of moral degeneration in contemporary Nigeria which has done more harm than good in the country's pursuit of national unity. Among the common societal vices identified by Oderinde (2009) are lying and cheating, premarital sex, robbery, abuse of office, advanced fees fraud, tribalism and nepotism, financial misappropriation, examination malpractices, drug abuse, thuggery, oil bunkering, human trafficking, abduction, and suicide bombing. Whether a country plagued by moral decay can prosper while simultaneously seeking to build a unified and progressive social framework is the concern of this paper. To this, the answer is an emphatic "no".

Numerous proposals have been put forward by Nigerians in order to ensure that the country remains one indivisible entity in which every citizen first sees himself as a Nigerian before seeing himself as Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Efik, Ibibio, Ijaw, Igala, or any other ethnic or cultural group in which he may identify with. This means establishing a Nigeria in which the level of national consciousness among the country's populace has been raised. In order to build a progressive and united society, it is necessary to produce patriotic, critical, democratic, and active individuals who are accountable in their cultural, social, economic, and political lives, as well as those who have a common vision for the future. Citizenship education acts as an antidote to the current circumstances in which Nigerian progress and unity are threatened, and it is a means of developing the much-needed unity necessary for the survival of the nation. Citizenship education is becoming increasingly popular in Nigeria. As Omare (1999) points out, countries are compelled to seek a solution to pressing problems of national importance at various times throughout history, and this has been the position of various countries in their pursuit of political stability, unity, peace, and progress, with citizenship education being the instrument used in every instance to achieve national consciousness and unity.

Osman and Eric (2020) argue that national progress can only be manifested when the people of a country are united and connected, and they are prepared to work together diligently to attain their goals. A confident statement can be made that the current insecurity concerns that face the country, such as ethnic and religious violence, terrorism, kidnapping, rape, political thuggery, banditry, and other social vices, are a result of government's failure to provide adequate citizenship education to citizens. To deal with Nigeria's current social and political difficulties, the authors suggest that human societies must move away from violent and destructive tendencies, in order to develop potential for creative, constructive, and non-violent capacities (Aliyu, Bichi, & Suleiman, 2021).

In recent years, citizenship education has gained in importance as a tool for governments to train their citizens in order for them to become more conscious of their legal, moral, and political rights as they gain more knowledge. In order to bring about the revival of national unity and stability in Nigeria, it is necessary to adopt civic education as a means of resurrecting waning national consciousness, patriotic fervor, and social harmony in a pluralistic society like Nigeria. Therefore, Nigeria should design a citizenship education curriculum that will assist to instill a feeling of national consciousness and awareness in students, as well as a sense of civic obligation. The objective of this paper is to examine in depth the significance of citizenship education in Nigeria, both in terms of effective citizenship and in terms of promoting peace and unity in the country.

Education
The importance of education in the creation and training of good citizens in a globalized society has garnered a great deal of attention in recent years, and it is anticipated to continue to do so in the future. Educational attainment is accorded such high importance in modern society because it is considered as a potent vehicle for social change and development. In the broader context of establishing national identity and citizenship, the relevance of education becomes clear, since it aids in the construction of 'good citizens.' Education is also important in the context of constructing national identity and citizenship.

By education, we refer to the deliberate process of instructing, moulding, and forming an individual with the explicit goal of transforming him into a critically aware, dynamic, and responsible citizen who would energetically channel the acquired experiences and skills for the growth, development, and advancement of society at large. In order to ensure peaceful survival in a constantly changing society, educational institutions must first and foremost transmit desirable and worthwhile knowledge, attitudes, values, and skills while simultaneously screening out undesirable attitudes and behaviour that are harmful to the peace and unity of society. It goes without saying that education is vital when it comes to developing knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that will enable individuals to contribute to and benefit from a more inclusive and sustainable future. Educational institutions must try to do more than simply preparing students for the world of work; they must also strive to equip students with the skills they will need to become active, responsible and involved citizens in their own communities (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2018).

As defined by Ogbonnaya (2020), "education" is a tool that empowers people by providing them with the necessary knowledge, skill, technique, and information, thereby enabling them to recognize and understand their own responsibilities and rights in relation to their families, communities, and country. Rather than teaching children how to do something, humanists assert that the purpose of education is to enable children to develop their natural potentialities so that they can function in society according to their abilities, interests, and needs, rather than to teach them how to do something (Kingdom, Orji, & Job as cited in Ogbonnaya, 2020).

According to Adesina (1985), education is a tool for the effective integration of an individual into a society, allowing the individual to achieve self-realization while also developing national consciousness and promoting unity. It also helps the recipients to be a part of the various social, economic, political, scientific, cultural, and technological processes that are taking place in and around him or her. As a result of this process of becoming acquainted with and integrating into his or her society, a citizen attempts to promote social culture and contributes to the development of his or her local surroundings as well as the overall development of the society.

Education, among other things, instills in a citizen the critical abilities, potentials, and intellectual expertise necessary to live in peace and harmony with their fellow citizens from different castes, religious, and ethnic groups; and as a result, education contributes to the promotion of national unity and stability in the polity. Many Nigerians believe that education is essential for accomplishing any substantial advancement, whether in the social or economic domains, or in the technological or political spheres, as well as in other areas (Ezekwesili, 2006). Additionally, education is seen not only as an instrument for enhanced national development but also the basis for the integration of individuals into effective and sound citizens who can function to foster unity and progress in the Nigerian society.

With the recent surge in science and technology, a new definition of the twenty-first century has emerged, namely, the "information explosion," in which information essential for national development and unity is shared through information and communication technology facilities such as the World Wide Web and the internet. Individuals receive information through the educational system on how to relate to and interact happily with people in society, regardless of their caste, religious beliefs, or ethnic group. It also assists them in comprehending the significance of efficient citizenship, which is necessary for the advancement and unification of humanity. Through education, people of diverse ethnic and cultural origins, as well as those of differing religious beliefs, can come together for a common cause, and this is made possible by the institution of the educational system. The development of relationships, according to Ogbonnaya (2020), encourages and increases mutual coexistence among the various students, and this has the potential to contribute to the development of nations all over the world in the twenty-first century, where the promotion of unity can be aided by the development of interpersonal relationships. In order for the educational system to produce good and responsible

citizens, a major emphasis on civic education and citizenship training must be placed by the educational system (Falade 2008).

Citizenship Education

The occurrence of inter-ethnic and religious conflicts, terrorism and banditry activities, kidnapping, armed robbery, ritual killings and political thuggery in Nigeria, all of which have hampered the country's progress and unity, has necessitated the introduction of citizenship education, particularly as it relates to national consciousness and unity. Citizenship education as a subject is densely packed with societal core values that prepare students to be critical and active members of their communities. Citizenship education is a powerful tool that can be used to promote peace and unity in Nigeria, as it helps to instill in the minds of students the importance of national consciousness and awareness of their own country. The definition of citizenship education given by Iyamu (1999) is a conscious effort to inculcate in youth a set of values and attitudes that are contingent on the needs and problems of the community. To put it in another way, citizenship education is a set of deliberate training and practices aimed at improving the ability of young people and adults to participate actively in democratic life by assuming and exercising their rights and responsibilities in their communities.

The term "citizenship education," according to Olutobi cited in Nwaji (2011), refers to the subject that is specifically designed in contents and function to produce healthy, good, and active citizens. A good citizen is seen as one who is patriotic, responsible, disciplined, and conscientious; he or she is also morally sound; and he or she has a strong sense of loyalty to his or her country. Citizenship education is also regarded as the subject that provides the child with the necessary ingredients to prepare him or her for social and political responsibilities in the community. Ikedianya as cited in Nwaji (2011), defined citizenship education as a purposeful process of inculcating particular values, habits, abilities, and attitudes that a society considers desirable and vital for the survival of the unit as well as the growth of the individual. Citizenship education, according to Fageyinbo (2004), is a continuous formal and non-formal education provided to all citizens, regardless of their location, gender, or economic status, with the goal of producing informed, nationalistic, participatory, rational, and articulate leaders and followers, among other things. Adding to this, Omolade (2006) stated that citizenship education is the process of fostering the development of a person's ideas, beliefs, habits, behaviour, and attitude in order for him or her to become a contributing member of society.

However, even a cursory examination of contemporary society reveals that moral decadence and value degradation are prevalent among Nigerian citizens. Citizens of Nigeria, both youth and adults, demonstrate a severe lack of moral principles such as empathy, self-discipline, honesty, integrity, selflessness, patriotism, hardwork, transparency, accountability, reliability, respect for human life, and respect for elders and constituted authority. In a similar vein, Okwilagwe (2013) asserted that both family and social values are being gradually undermined in Nigeria as a whole. However, it is important to note that the declining level of moral values, cultural norms, and attitudes

has wreaked havoc on the nation's socio-economic and political development, as well as on the country's overall peace and unity, among other things. This has cast a serious aspersion on the image of the country among the comity of nations.

In Nigeria, it has been noticed that Nigerians only have a sense of ethnic unity rather than a sense of national unity; and it is in the national interest of the country for all of the concerned ethnic groups in Nigeria to acquire respect for each other's cultural values and conventions. In support of this viewpoint, Obike (1993) asserted that citizenship education could help students have a better knowledge of the cultures of other ethnic groups in the society. To put it in another way, civic education teaches and develops citizens to be well-informed, critical thinkers who reject ethnocentrism, abhor religious antagonism, and embrace a sense of national identity and unity.

Any strategy for developing common values into an inclusive national character, which must be respected and treasured by the whole political community in a pluralistic country such as Nigeria, would have citizenship education as an important part of that plan. It is intended to imbibe and inculcate some desirable values and attitudes in learners through the study of citizenship education, which is directed toward the accomplishment of distinct national consciousness. These values and attitudes include but are not limited to the following:
a. Human life and dignity are to be respected.
b. Have faith in man's ability to make well-informed choices.
c. The use of cultural and moral standards in interpersonal and human relationships.
d. Joint responsibility for the common good of society.
e. Promote the mental, emotional, and physical health of all citizens, including children and the elderly.

In essence, citizenship education is a programme of instruction meant to instill in young learners the knowledge, understanding, and abilities necessary for full and successful engagement in the society of which they are a part (Omolade, 2006). Civic education serves the same purpose, in that it imparts valuable knowledge and attitudes to all citizens as well as skills and values that contribute to the advancement of national consciousness as well as good followership and leadership qualities, as well as peace and unity in the political community. In terms of education, citizenship education may be defined as a sort of education that is concerned with the development of good character and the development of good behaviour in citizens in order for them to make a constructive contribution to the growth of their society (Koku, 2017). It follows that, as a course of study, citizenship education assists in developing and moulding individuals into responsible and active members of society who also make a constructive contribution to the development of the community in which they live.

Goals of citizenship education in Nigeria

Civic education is primarily designed to produce a disciplined society that will allow for the development of democratic growth that is coordinated, harmonious, peaceful, and stable, and which will, in turn, promote national unity and progress. According to Williams (2014), the following are the objectives to be achieved:

1. To mitigate the negative effects of plurality or diversity of cultures, and clash of political interest, and ensure a unified Nigeria through effective use of schools, mass media as an instrument for nation building by teaching Citizenship Education as a subject.

2. Improve the national consciousness of Nigerians so that the country stays as an integrated entity in which every Nigerian considers himself first and foremost as a Nigerian before considering himself as a Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Muslim, Christian, or any other ethnic or religious group.

3. Making Nigerian citizens aware of their rights and obligations is number three on the list.

4. Inspire citizens to become valuable and engaged members of society by providing them with opportunities.

National unity

In order to build a united and progressive nation, any country on the planet earth should work hard to re-orient its citizens toward imbibing a culture of national consciousness and peaceful coexistence in which every member, regardless of their class, political affiliation, religious belief, and/or ethnic group, can live together in harmony and peace. Developing a strong sense of shared or common values is critical to holding a nation together in unity and aiding in the formation of national identity rather than having national identity influenced by culture and ethnic group. Nationalism has an objectively obvious impact on modern nation-states because it makes the formation of a national consensus much faster and easier, which in turn accelerates the growth of a nation. What exactly is "national unity" in this context?

Essentially, national unity is the process of bringing together people of different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds under a single form of national identity. National unity, according to Amri, as stated in Chang, Azizan, and Amran (2013), is defined as the processes that bring together the entire community and nation in order to establish a common interest and oneness identity that allows people to love and be proud of their country and its people. Interestingly, national unity can be defined as the collective desire of a nation's residents to promote peace and stability, which acts as a common interest for the citizens of the country. According to the most recent definition, national unity can be defined as "a condition in which all citizens from all groups (ethnic, religious, and regional) live in peace as one united nation, offering complete dedication to national identity based on the Federal Constitution and the National Ideology" (Chang et al., 2013). According to Busola (2017), national unity and integration empower people to share ideas, values, and emotional relationships through creating a sense of belonging. It demonstrates the sentiment of oneness in the face of variety. A strong sense of national

unity is one of the most effective strategies of preventing internal conflicts, which can deplete the nation's resources and cause its progress to be derailed.

As a result, it is a critical component of modern administration, and its protection and promotion necessitates the expenditure of state resources on this front (Abubakar, 2021). To achieve national unity, it is necessary to develop a national outlook, which is a common identity in which every member of the society views one another as brothers and sisters and, as a result, does almost everything in common for the benefit of everyone in the society, which is referred to as "common good." All of the country's citizens organize and structure their lives in order to adhere to the society's way of life, and they all work together to ensure the overall well-being of the country as a whole.

Whenever one talks about national unity, the focus is no longer on identifying with one's ethnic or religious group, but rather on national identity as a sense of belonging to a larger community. People no longer consider themselves to be members of any component entity inside the country, but rather as members of the country as a whole. Furthermore, according to MAMSER as reported in Onyibor (2016), members of a country identify as a nation when they are proud of their country and, as a result, are inward-looking, and their attachment to and pride in their country are a reflection of their identification.

Equally important is constructing an inclusive, progressive, and cohesive nation-state with a social order founded on fairness and fair play for all its citizens, regardless of their caste, language, ethnicity, or religious affiliation. It is only through a deep love and dedication to their country, according to Onyibor (2016), that a united and strong nation can make strides forward and grow in strength. Only until this has been accomplished can the country be assured of progressing toward being a united, strong, and thriving nation.

Factors responsible for the promotion of national unity in Nigeria
The promotion and attainment of national unity is dependent on a number of diverse variables, all of which must be considered in the context of the development of a dynamic, stable, and united society that advances in all areas of cultural, social, economic, political, and technological development. According to Adeosun (2021), these considerations comprise the following elements:

❖ It is necessary to have social cohesiveness and cooperation.
❖ It is necessary to maintain a steady stream of public education in order to create national unity.
❖ To foster unity (shared interest) rather than ethnic interest in Nigeria, all Nigerians, including all ethnic and religious groupings, must agree.
❖ The citizens of the country must be tolerant of one another's ethnic and religious backgrounds.
❖ The encouragement of discipline, as well as the provision of rewards for hardwork, is essential.
❖ Constitutionalism and the rule of law are two concepts that must be honoured by both citizens and government.

❖ It is essential for all citizens to cultivate a sense of patriotism toward their government and nation.

Importance of national unity in Nigeria
It is theoretically possible to achieve national unity in a multi-ethnic society such as Nigeria by embarking on the process of creating a new society that is free of ill-treatment and discrimination against any member unit of the community. Aside from that, it is devoid of tribal emotion but instead, it is a true expression of national consciousness in its contents. Patriotism and allegiance to the country are engendered in citizens as a result of this act. According to Busola (2017), the following are the primary reasons for national unity:
❖ It contributes to the development of the country.
❖ It aids the country's government in better understanding of the needs and preferences of its citizens.
❖ It contributes to the unity and strength of the nation.
❖ It contributes to national security.
❖ It promotes people to communicate their views, ideals, and emotional relationships with one another.

Adeosun (2021) highlights the following other noteworthy advantages of national unity that are worth mentioning:
❖ The promotion of national unity encourages citizens to put up their best effort in their service and/or obligations.
❖ There will be economic progress as well as an increase in foreign direct investment.
❖ It works to advance fundamental human rights and to advance the rule of law.
❖ It will aid in the advancement of social, economic, and political development in the society at large.

Major obstacles militating against the achievement of national unity in Nigeria
As the country grapples with a slew of challenges in its quest to construct a nation that all citizens can be proud of, achieving national peace and unity in Nigeria has seriously taken the character of an audacious adventure. The following are some of the reasons why successive Nigerian administrations have failed to achieve the desired results in their efforts to develop a vibrant, strong, united, and democratic society. The following difficulties are identified and discussed below:

i. **Tribalism:** It is the behaviour and attitudes that result from a strong commitment to one's tribe or social group to the detriment of other groups that are referred to as tribalism. It is a severe challenge to the country's efforts at building a strong and united nation; this alarming phenomena poses a serious threat to the country's efforts to develop a strong and united nation.

ii. **The dearth of moral values:** Moral principles are in short supply these days, as individuals are growing increasingly egotistical. In order to make the young ones better

and more responsible citizens, it is essential that cultural and moral values are instilled in them from an early age. Otherwise, all attempts to bring about peace, unity, and growth in Nigeria will be in vain.

iii.   **Absence of true federalism:** Another important impediment to national unity is the absence of true federalism, as evidenced by the lopsided federal system currently in place in Nigeria. Imhonopi and Urim, as cited in Uriah et al. (2020), argued that federalism, as it is currently practiced in Nigeria, suffers from a number of factors, including a lack of fiscal federalism, over-centralization of power at the centre, laidback or non-viable states, and the absence of state police, among others.

iv.   **Poor execution of educational policies:** The education sector in Nigeria has deteriorated to a point that is distressing for the country's citizens. It was discovered that the educational system has deteriorated as a result of ineffective implementation of policies caused mostly by inadequate money, a lack of political will, a lack of continuity in programme delivery, and corruption.

v.   **Absence of social orientation:** Lack of a social orientation refers to the absence of a person's socialization system, which explains why he or she exhibits certain behaviours, connections, and adaptations with other people and/or society in general. The absence of sound social orientation among Nigerians obstructs the development of a society in which persons from various ethnic and religious backgrounds can live in peace and harmony with one another. This is one of the most significant impediments to the unity and advancement of Nigeria as a country.

vi.   **Uneven distribution of resources:** In Nigeria, resources are not allocated equitably since one group receives a larger share of the country's resources than other groups. A great deal of arguing occurs among Nigeria's ethnic groups, which breeds divisiveness, distrust and intolerance among the people of the country. Due to the fact that one individual or group of people has more authority or privileges than others, this scenario is skewed, and it makes it harder to build national unity.

vii.   **Social crisis:** Social crises include a country being engulfed in a severe economic and violent crisis such as high unemployment rates and scarcity of food, acts of terrorism and banditry, as well as kidnapping and prostitution. In Nigeria, these negative events, as they are currently manifested, pose a significant threat to the nation's development as a progressive, powerful, and cohesive entity.

viii.   **Religious prejudices:** Every community has the right to create its own religion, but it must not do so at the expense of other religions or other cultures. In spite of the fact that Nigeria is a secular state, there are periodic outbreaks of violence in the name of religion. The Nigerian people are not well-versed in the various religions and ways of life practiced by other people. Consequently, they grow distrustful of and even hostile toward other religions, posing a barrier to national unity (Uriah, Amadi, & Moneme, 2020).

Role of citizenship education in promoting national unity in Nigeria
Citizenship education has an enormous role to play in the personal growth of good, law-abiding citizens and the overall progress of the nation. The role of citizenship education as mentioned by Ugwuogo (2019) are as follows:

❖ To inculcate citizens with the spirit of patriotism: Citizenship education focuses on assisting citizens to develop national consciousness. National consciousness involves being aware of the history, culture, and ideals of the nation.

❖ To teach citizens the fundamental human rights and responsibilities: Every citizen has rights that he is free to enjoy without restriction. Citizenship education enlightens citizens on the fundamental human right of citizens in the nation.

❖ To enhance the knowledge of the Nigerian constitution: The constitution is an accepted set of laws, bound by law, detailing activities and regulations of the government of a country.

❖ To promote self-development: Citizenship education teaches citizens to think for themselves and respect positive principles. It helps to build citizens who are peaceful, just, united, self-reliant, diligent, and rational.

❖ To promote national development: The widespread development within a community is brought about by members of that community. Development is recognized when the economy is increasing at a progressive rate and successfully utilising its resources to meet the needs of its population, sustainably, so that future generations may also benefit from the resources.

Conclusion

Peace, growth, and togetherness in Nigeria have all suffered as a result of Nigeria's misleading merger as a single territorial entity. One of the most serious shortcomings of the British colonial masters was their inability to effectively connect, orientate, and integrate the people of Nigeria in order for them to create a sense of national consciousness and a shared commitment to the establishment of a united country. Based on the foregoing, religious fanaticism, ethnic politics, terrorism, tribal sentiment and conflicts, farmers/herders crises, and banditry have engulfed the country in recent years, posing a threat to the country's survival as a nation-state. Many Nigerians' lives are devoid of the ingredients necessary for the development of a strong and united nation, as evidenced by their adherence to negative values such as waywardness, narrow-mindedness, untruthfulness, and other anti-national tendencies. Specifically, the authors of this paper underlined that if Nigeria aspires to remain a unified state, all hands must be on deck to ensure that key societal values are properly instilled in the country's population. As a result, Nigerian people, both children and adults, must strive to instill in them the principles that would enable them to always put the interests of the nation ahead of their own, their social, political, religious, and ethnic groups.

Recommendations

1. All citizens of Nigeria irrespective of ethnic and religious background must endeavour to exhibit respect for others, and their dignity, as well as cultivate the will to live and work together peacefully and harmoniously with fellow citizens.

2. All Nigerian citizens must be treated fairly and equally as well as a deliberate development of a feeling of oneness among Nigerians towards the attainment of national unity.

3. Citizenship education curriculum must be designed to promotes national unity and national consciousness among the citizenry which is essential for nation-building and the sustainable development of Nigeria as a nation.

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