

## **CRITICAL THINKING AND THE QUEST FOR NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN NIGERIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper upholds that national integration is a pivotal element for the stability and progress of any nation, especially a diverse and culturally rich country like Nigeria. Drawing on existing literature and empirical evidence, the paper examines the concept of critical thinking and its relevance to addressing the underlying factors hindering national integration. The importance of cultivating critical thinking skills among citizens as a means to challenge stereotypes, prejudices, and divisive narratives that perpetuate disunity were specifically pinpointed and analysed. Furthermore, the paper examines the current state of national integration in Nigeria, identifying key barriers such as ethno-religious tensions, regional disparities, and political fragmentation. It underscores the need for proactive measures to promote inclusive dialogue, respect for diversity, and a shared national identity. Using the method of philosophical analysis and argumentation, the paper suggests strategies for integrating critical thinking into educational curricula, public discourse, and policymaking processes. It also emphasizes the role of educational institutions, media, civil society, and government in fostering a culture of critical inquiry, empathy, and understanding across diverse communities. The paper submits that the promotion of critical thinking skills among Nigerians is essential for transcending divisive identities and forging a cohesive national identity rooted in mutual respect, empathy, and collective aspirations for a prosperous and unified Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Critical thinking, National integration, Nigeria

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In the ancient period of western philosophy, Plato indicated that the teachings of Socrates are the earliest records of critical thinking. In an early dialogue by Plato, Socrates debates several speakers about the ethical matter of the rightness or wrongness of Socrates escaping from prison (Visser and Visser 8). Socrates established the unreliability of Authority and of authority figures to possess knowledge and consequent insight; that for an individual man or woman to lead a good life that is worth living, that person must ask critical questions and possess an interrogative soul, which seeks evidence and then closely examines the available facts, and then follows the implications of the statement under analysis, thereby tracing the implications of thought and action (Stanlick 6). As a form of co-operative argumentation, Socratic questioning requires the comparative judgment of facts, which answers then would reveal the

person's irrational thinking and lack of verifiable knowledge. Socrates also demonstrated that Authority does not ensure accurate, verifiable knowledge; thus, Socratic questioning analyses beliefs, assumptions, and presumptions, by relying upon evidence and a sound rationale.

The development of critical thinking is a means of critical analysis that applies rationality to develop a critique of the subject matter (Walters 118). Critical Thinking is the process of using and assessing reasons to evaluate statements, assumptions, and arguments in ordinary situations. The goal of this process is to help us have good beliefs which would imply that our beliefs meet certain goals of thought, such as truth, usefulness, or rationality. In contrast with formal reasoning processes that are largely restricted to deductive methods, decision theory, logic, statistics, the process of critical thinking allows a wide range of reasoning methods, including formal and informal logic, linguistic analysis, historical and textual methods, and philosophical methods, such as Socratic questioning and reasoning by counterexample or conversational approach. The goals of critical thinking are also more diverse than those of formal reasoning systems. The primary subject matter of critical thinking is the proper use and goals of a range of reasoning methods, how they are applied in a variety of social contexts, and errors in reasoning. Critical thinking should not be confused with critical theory which refers to a way of doing philosophy that involves a moral critique of culture. A critical theory attempts to disprove or discredit a widely held or influential idea or way of thinking in society. Thus, critical race theorists and critical gender theorists offer critiques of traditional views and latent assumptions about race and gender. Critical theorists may use critical thinking methodology, but their subject matter is distinct, and they also may offer critical analyses of critical thinking itself.

People's ethical views will often be evoked when faced with dilemmas. one might initiate a detailed thought process that allows one to make a decision one is comfortable with implementing. The foundation and path of always making good decisions could help one have to make significant decisions in one's life. The analytical thinking process to be used in such is called critical thinking. Critical thinking is a process of gathering and evaluating data to make decisions and solve problems. While applying a logical thought process, considering the repercussions and possible outcomes, thinking outside your normal parameters, reflecting on past experiences, using forward thinking to devise new ideas, being open-minded about answers, pose questions and give possible answers to yourself, you are thinking critically in one or more forms regarding your issue. The notion of critical thinking and the issues surrounding national integration in Nigeria will be considered using the above approach.

## **2. THE NOTION OF CRITICAL THINKING**

Critical thinking is a kind of thinking which entails to question, analyze, interpret, evaluate and make a judgement about what one read, hear, say, or write. Etymologically, the term critical comes from the Greek word *kritikos* meaning able to judge or discern. Good critical thinking is about making reliable judgements based on reliable information. Applying critical thinking does not mean being negative or focusing on faults. It means being able to clarify ones' thinking so that one can break down a problem or a piece of information, interpret it and use that

interpretation to arrive at an informed decision or judgement. In general terms, critical thinking is seen as a purposeful skill. This means that critical thinking is related to dispositions. As in the case of creativity, to be a critical thinker involves not only specific cognitive abilities, but also willingness to assess and evaluate information in a critical manner. In other words, the intention of a person to be critical is crucial to developing critical thinking skills. In this sense, critical thinking has been seen as self-regulatory judgment. Research in critical thinking is usually associated with two main traditions, one more psychologically oriented and focused on teaching meta-cognition skills, thinking how to think, and one more philosophically oriented, more interested in the ontological nature of the phenomena of thought and judgment.

To become a better critical thinker, one therefore need to learn how to: clarify one's thinking purpose and context, question one's sources of information, identify arguments, analyze sources and arguments, evaluate the arguments of others and, synthesize one's own arguments. Critical thinking generally involves the analysis and identification of central issues and assumptions. That is to say, critical thinking requires analyzing how arguments and thoughts are constructed and if they are robust in their formulation. Because of this, certain advocates of critical thinking have maintained that critical thinking is about providing standards of thought. Judgments should be evaluated in terms of clarity, credibility, accuracy, precision, relevance, depth, breadth, and significance. Critical thinking is always associated with the identification of bias in ideas or statements. It can be said that critical thinking can be considered a specific form of convergent thinking.

David Hitchcock summarizes the definition of critical thinking as "careful thinking directed toward a goal" (9). In "Critical Thinking as an Educational Ideal", Hitchcock writes;

Critical thinking is a widely accepted educational goal. Its definition is contested, but the competing definitions can be understood as differing conceptions of the same basic concept: careful thinking directed to a goal. Conceptions differ with respect to the scope of such thinking, the type of goal, the criteria and norms for thinking carefully, and the thinking components on which they focus. "Critical thinkers" have the dispositions and abilities that lead them to think critically when appropriate. The abilities can be identified directly; the dispositions indirectly, by considering what factors contribute to or impede exercise of the abilities (10).

From the above quote, Critical thinking is a widely accepted educational goal. Conceptions differ with respect to the scope of such thinking, the type of goal, the criteria and norms for thinking carefully, and the thinking components on which they focus. Its adoption as an educational goal has been recommended on the basis of respect for students' autonomy and preparing students for success in life and for democratic citizenship. For Michael Scriven and Richard Paul;

Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skilfully conceptualizing, applying, analysing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. In its exemplary form, it is based on universal intellectual values that transcend subject matter

divisions: clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth, and fairness (23).

Critical thinking is characterized by a broad set of related skills usually including the abilities to break down a problem into its constituent parts to reveal its underlying logic and assumptions, recognize and account for one's own biases in judgment and experience, collect and assess relevant evidence from either personal observations and experimentation or by gathering external information. It also includes to adjust and reevaluate one's own thinking in response to what one has learned, and form a reasoned assessment in order to propose a solution to a problem or a more accurate understanding of the topic at hand. Theorists have noted that such skills are only valuable insofar as a person is inclined to use them. Consequently, they emphasize that certain habits of mind are necessary components of critical thinking. This disposition may include curiosity, open-mindedness, self-awareness, empathy, and persistence.

Controversies have arisen over the generalizability of critical thinking across domains, over alleged bias in critical thinking theories and instruction, and over the relationship of critical thinking to other types of thinking. Although there is a generally accepted set of qualities that are associated with critical thinking, scholarly writing about the term has highlighted disagreements over its exact definition and whether and how it differs from related concepts such as problem solving. In addition, some theorists have insisted that critical thinking be regarded and valued as a process and not as a goal-oriented skill set to be used to solve problems. Bailin et al. claim that, if one considers what sorts of thinking an educator would take not to be critical thinking and what sorts to be critical thinking, one can conclude that educators typically understand critical thinking to have at least three features: it is done for the purpose of making up one's mind about what to believe or do; the person engaging in the thinking is trying to fulfill standards of adequacy and accuracy appropriate to the thinking, the thinking fulfills the relevant standards to some threshold level (269). One could sum up the core concept that involves these three features by saying that critical thinking is careful goal-directed thinking.

### **3. THE RELEVANCE OF CRITICAL THINKING TO NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN NIGERIA**

In critical thinking, the thinking is only a strategy to arrive at informed criticism, which is itself a starting point for understanding one's self or the world around. Also, in critical thinking, there is no fixed conclusion; it is constant interaction with changing circumstances and new knowledge that allows for a broader vision which allows for new evidence, which starts the process over again. This implies the integration of the opposites for a possible synthesis. To think critically about something is to claim to first circle its meaning entirely; to walk all the way around it so that you understand it in a way that's uniquely you. What is being critically considered here is the issue of national integration in Nigeria. In thinking critically, the thinker has to see its parts, its form, its function, and its context. It includes the ability to engage in reflective and independent thinking. Someone with critical thinking skills is able to do the following: understand the logical connections between ideas, identify, construct, and evaluate arguments; detect inconsistencies and common mistakes in reasoning, solve problems

systematically, identify the relevance and importance of ideas, and reflect on the justification of one's own beliefs and values. Although critical thinking skills can be used in exposing fallacies and bad reasoning, critical thinking can also play an important role in cooperative reasoning and constructive tasks. Critical thinking can help us address the issue of national integration in Nigeria. The remaining part of this paper will focus on the relevance of critical thinking to human development as well as national integration in Nigeria.

### **3.1 The Impact of Critical Thinking Skills to Citizens or Human Development**

The importance of cultivating critical thinking skills among citizens as a means to challenge stereotypes, prejudices, and divisive narratives that perpetuate disunity cannot be over emphasized. Critical thinking entails the analysis of available facts, evidence, observations, and arguments in order to form a judgement by the application of rational, skeptical, and unbiased analyses and evaluation. The application of critical thinking includes self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective habits of the mind. Thus, a critical thinker is a person who practices the skills of critical thinking or has been trained and educated in its disciplines. The mind of a critical thinker engages the person's intellectual abilities and personality traits. Critical thinking presupposes assent to rigorous standards of excellence and mindful command of their use in effective communication, problem solving, and a commitment to overcome egocentrism.

It is the position of this paper that critical thinking skills on the individuals or citizens of the country would go a long way in fostering national integration in Nigeria as well as human development. One of the features of critical thinking is the ability to carefully examine something, whether it is a problem, a set of data, or a text. People with analytical skills can examine information, understand what it means, and properly explain to others the implications of that information asking thoughtful questions, research, interpretation, judgment, questioning evidence, and recognizing patterns. Critical thinking is a domain-general thinking skill. The ability to think clearly and rationally is important whatever we choose to do. If you work in education, research, finance, management or the legal profession, then critical thinking is obviously important. But critical thinking skills are not restricted to a particular subject area. Being able to think well and solve problems systematically is an asset for everyone.

Critical thinking enhances language and communication skills. Thinking clearly and systematically can improve the way we express our ideas. In some cases, one will need to share one's conclusions with others. In such situation, one needs to be able to communicate with others to share the ideas effectively. One might also need to engage in critical thinking in a group. In this case, one will need to work with others and communicate effectively to figure out solutions to complex problems. Some of the language and communication skills that critical thinking improves in individuals include active listening, assessment, collaboration, explanation, interpersonal, presentation, teamwork, verbal communication, and written communication.

Critical thinking promotes creativity. Critical thinking often involves creativity and innovation. With critical thinking, one could spot patterns in available information or come up with a

solution that no one else has thought of before. All of this involves a creative eye that can take a different approach from all other approaches. Creative skill will include; flexibility, conceptualization, curiosity, imagination, drawing connections, inferring, predicting, synthesizing, and vision. To come up with a creative solution to a problem involves not just having new ideas. It must also be the case that the new ideas being generated are useful and relevant to the task at hand. Critical thinking plays a crucial role in evaluating new ideas, selecting the best ones and modifying them if necessary. Critical thinking is an essential part of creativity because we need critical thinking to evaluate and improve our creative ideas.

Critical thinking is a metacognitive skill that requires open-mindedness. What this means is that it is a higher-level cognitive skill that involves thinking about thinking. We have to be aware of the good principles of reasoning, and be reflective about our own reasoning. In addition, we often need to make a conscious effort to improve ourselves, avoid biases, and maintain objectivity. This is notoriously hard to do. To think critically, one needs to be able to put aside any assumptions or judgments and analyze the information received. Objectivity is needed here, evaluating ideas without bias requires fairness, humility, inclusive, objectivity, observation, and reflection. According to Reynolds, an individual or group engaged in a strong way of critical thinking gives due consideration to establish for instance; evidence through reality, context skills to isolate the problem from context, relevant criteria for making the judgment well, applicable methods or techniques for forming the judgment, and applicable theoretical constructs for understanding the problem and the question at hand (39). Critical thinking employs not only logic but broad intellectual criteria such as clarity, credibility, accuracy, precision, relevance, depth, breadth, significance, and fairness.

Problem-solving is another critical thinking skill that involves analyzing a problem, generating and implementing a solution, and assessing the success of the plan. Critical thinking involves problem-solving, decision making, metacognition, rationality, rational thinking, reasoning, knowledge, intelligence and also a moral component such as reflective thinking. Critical thinkers therefore need to have reached a level of maturity in their development, possess a certain attitude as well as a set of taught skills. There is a postulation by some writers that the tendencies from habits of mind should be thought as virtues to demonstrate the characteristics of a critical thinker (Facione et al. 13). These intellectual virtues are ethical qualities that encourage motivation to think in particular ways towards specific circumstances. However, these virtues have also been criticized by skeptics who argue that the evidence is lacking for a specific mental basis underpinning critical thinking (Bailin et al. 270).

Critical thinking is crucial for self-reflection. In order to live a meaningful life and to structure our lives accordingly, we need to justify and reflect on our values and decisions. Critical thinking provides the tools for this process of self-evaluation. Also, good critical thinking is the foundation democracy. The proper functioning of a liberal democracy requires citizens who can think critically about social issues to inform their judgments about proper governance and to overcome biases and prejudice.

### **3.2 Current State of National Integration in Nigeria**

Nigeria became an independent in 1960 with the hope that the citizens will be integrated with one another for the purposes of co-existence, administration, and development of the nation. Up till now, there have been ethnic and religious crises that made the actualization of national integration difficult. Since Nigeria's independence, Nigerian politics has been bedevilled by ethnic politics as a result of ethnic polarization and sentimental coloration of all national issues. Ethno-religious crises in Nigeria are deeply rooted and is threatening the very survival of the country as a nation. Often times are intra and inter religious crises. This problem has been one of the major factors inhibiting national integration in Nigeria. Nigerian politics is tainted with ethnic sentiments and politically induced disharmony. It is obvious that the grievances which normally aggravate ethnic religious crises are most often than not revealed through sectarian crises, tribal unrest, and bitter political complaints among others. However, the question of national integration is of necessity and not a matter of choice. National integration in Nigeria after independence is an ontological necessity and not a choice. This section critically examines the current state of national integration in Nigeria, identifying key barriers such as ethno-religious tensions, regional disparities, and political fragmentation.

National integration is a process by which members of a social system develop linkages and location so that the boundaries of the system persist over time and the boundaries of sub-systems become less consequential in affecting behaviour. In this process "members of the social system develop an escalating sequence of contact, cooperation, consensus and community" (Ojo 29). Etzioni has argued that a community can only be considered cohesive when it meets the following touchstones: it has effective control over the use of the means of violence; it has a centre of decision making capable of effecting the allocation of resources and rewards; and it is a dominant focus of political identification for a large majority of politically aware citizens (65). Ojo avers that these viewpoints have not answered the questions such as how would one recognise an integrated polity? How much cohesion and which commonly accepted norms denote an integrated political or social unit? How would an observer identify integration or is it dependent on some other manifestations to demonstrate a lack of integration? And what institutional form will an integrated unit take? Or are institutional forms irrelevant to integration? These fundamental questions require critical thinking or reflection.

National integration is seen as a process that produces initiatives put in place by a state, its representatives or institutions guided by respect for the unique culture and traditions of ethnicities sharing the same polity with the goal of harmonising all interests through critical thinking in form of dialogue and representation and addressing differences that may be divisive and conflictual using the instruments of fairness, justice and equity in the sharing of resources, benefits, opportunities and responsibilities in order to guarantee stability, longevity and prosperity of the polity as long as the inhabitants decide to remain within the polity (Ataide and Enebong 3). According to Awa, national integration "is a process of creating a sense of national consciousness, uniqueness of identity and loyalty among people of different socio-cultural identities (racial, ethnic, language, religion, and so on) into a single territorial political society" (23). These diversities are evidently manifested in the citizens' cultural and religious practices. For instance, there are more than four hundred documented ethnic groups across the country comprising of millions of people who are adherents of the two major religion.

Nigeria is a country with diverse ethnic groups, existing side by side, struggling for survival, identification, and recognition. Feeling of suspicion and domination of one religion, ethnic group, geographical zone or tribe over another becomes inevitable. According to Adam and Ocheni, “the incessant struggles to have control over the nation’s resources remain the bone of contention and sources of threat to peaceful co-existence and national unity” (1). There are several factors that are responsible for the fragmentation and disunity in any complex state. Some of these factors include ethnocentrism, regionalism, party disparities, religious intolerance, ethnicity, linguistic differences and so on.

Ethnicity is a major task confronting the achievement of democracy in Nigeria since independence. Nigeria is made up of 250 ethnic groups (Ejikeme, 16). Ethnic sentiment is present almost in all areas of Nigerian political economic and social organizations. This therefore implies that Nigeria is multi-lingual and multi-ethnic in nature. These tribal differences have given rise for diverse nature of the Nigerian nation. This indicates that though housed in one country, the ethnic groups do not have identical needs, objectives and aspirations. Thus, the country continues to face problems related to integration. Specifically, acrimonious existence among the different groups that make up the country, fear of domination of one group or section of the country by another and incessant disagreement over the distribution of wealth and resources among the constituent units precipitate mutual distrust and affect the process of nation building. Each group, in the state, organizes in opposition to other groups at a similar level until the entire group organizes at highest level against a similarly organized enemy. Each person is a member of overlapping subgroups and has, therefore, many overlapping identities. Each identity is called into play only in the appropriate circumstance. The identities are politically neutral but as the situation warrants, actors can widen or narrow down to the boundaries of ethnic identity in the pursuance of their desires to the detriment of other groups or national identity in Nigeria.

Nigeria’s efforts at ensuring sustainable national integration have failed probably because of the aggregated character of the states that was produced by colonialism in Nigeria in which the identity symbols are usually considered relevant. The identity symbols usually emphasized are the kinship, language, culture and spatial location, conveniently referred to as ethnic identity. In particular, communal, ethnic, and ethno-religious politicization and mobilization have increased since democratization opened up political space in May 1999. Also, the most cursory glance at the history of Nigeria reveals that from about 1951, ethnicity became the hallmark of Nigerian politics (Ojo 21). The foregoing realities explain the factors preventing the emergence of nationally acknowledged policies of government, political leaders, national identity and so on. Consequentially, the integration crisis facing Nigeria is manifested in the citizenship question, minority question, religious conflicts, ethnic politics, resource control, youth restiveness and the call for a sovereign national conference or division of the country along religion, ethnic or geographical composition.

This position is supported by the theory of social functionalism. As a rule, this theory also referred to as theory of functionalism tries to explain how the relationships among the parts of



society are created and how these parts are functional and sometimes dysfunctional. It focuses on consensus, social order, social structure and social functioning in society. Structural functionalism as the theory is sometime referred, sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability; it states that social lives are guided by social structures, which are relatively stable patterns of social behaviour (Macionis 97). Social structure is understood in terms of social functions which are consequences for the operations of society. All social structure contributes to the operation of society (Imhonopi and Urim 22). Terms developed in this theory include: order, structure, function, and equilibrium. Structural functionalists ask pertinent questions such as: what holds society together? and what keeps it steady? Similarly, the structural functionalist theory pays considerable attention to the persistence of shared ideas in society. The functional aspect in the structural-functionalist theory stresses the role played by each component part in the social system, whereas the structural perspective suggests an image of society wherein individuals are constrained by social forces, social backgrounds and by group memberships.

One of the challenges to Nigeria's national integration is the lack of consensus. And there can be no consensus without dialogue. While some measure of social order or subdued violence has been reached in Nigeria, the ethnicities that make up the modern Nigerian state must come to the table of negotiations to discuss the future and destiny of the country, how they want to be governed, how resources need to be shared, what system of government needs to bind and guide constituent units, how power is to be shared and the redefinition of citizenship, settler and indigeneship status, and many more. This could be properly achieved with critical thinking skills explained in the previous section.

### **3.3 Critical Thinking Pedagogy as a Tool for National Integration**

The use of the term, critical thinking, to describe an educational goal goes back to John Dewey, who called it reflective thinking and defined it as "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends" (6). He identified a habit of such consideration with a scientific attitude of mind. In educational contexts, a definition of critical thinking is a "programmatic definition" (Scheffler, 19). There are philosophies that have been inspired through critical thinking of which when applied to discuss the factors that militate against national integration, like ethnicity, would go a long way to foster it. Some of those philosophies includes the philosophy of integrative humanism, Ibuanidanda complementary reflection or theory of the missing link, and so on. According to Ozumba, the main aim of integrative humanism is show that man is at the Centre of God's creation; it is a philosophy that wishes to make man to cooperate with fellow human beings than with the productive process (20). Integrative humanism becomes a method when it is articulated and used either in interpreting a mass of reality or an instrument in conducting research or as a way of bringing a new understanding to bear on old facts (Ozumba 23). Man, at the base, is a creature formed by the divine for a consummate purpose, that of learning to live in harmony with one another so as to live in harmony with The One in the after-life. If we fail to facilitate this mutuality in our existence through parochial cleavaging, we are bound to limit the power that lies in integrative

resourcefulness. This will lead to divisiveness which, in turn will lead to truncation of the noble ideals of *Njikoka* (Ozumba and Chimakonam v).

Integrativism means to bring two or more things together to make them work together to achieve a desired purpose. But Asouzu sees complementarity in terms of complementary mindset that seek the type of harmony that is all inclusive, comprehensive and universal in all aspects of life (46). The *Ibuanyidanda* method comes from a horizon that is defined by two complementary principles, namely, the metaphysical principle of integration and the principle of progressive transformation (303). In *Method and Principle*, Asouzu sees the missing links as the diverse units that make up an entity within the framework of the whole as they are complementarily related; this means that we cannot talk about missing links without complementarity and fragmentation (277). In *Ikwa Ogwe*, Asouzu avers that; the general principles of complementary reflection as the principle of harmonious integration state that anything that exists serves a missing link of reality and that all human actions are geared towards the joy of being (186). This implies that in any given framework or system of action, all units, no matter how insignificant enter necessarily into the definition of the system in question.

Ethnocentric commitment arises from the mind's tendency to misuse or misinterpret its ethnic consciousness or affiliation. It is the tendency of the mind to affirm and uphold the interest of those it perceives to be nearest to it and negate those it perceives as external to it. Every member of an ethnic group has a group identity. It is the consciousness of this group identity, aided by an imbibed bifurcating and polarizing mindset that makes the mind to tend to cling and uphold the interest of those nearest to it in utter negation of those not so close. Since we tend to act under this impulse of our primitive instinct of self-preservation always and often unintentionally, one can say that in most multicultural and multiethnic contexts, there is often the tendency for the mind to act in an unintended ethnocentric fashion, in view of securing certain interests and privileges it defines as very important for the inner circle (Asouzu 130). The instinct of self-preservation leads the mind to assume that the nearer is better and safer. This assumption Asouzu believes is raised to a super-maxim that guides our inter-relationship and other kinds of relationships. This has been the hallmark of disintegration among different tribes in the country. Those who think critically would be free from such mindset.

The objectives of education include to foster patriotism, national unity, harmonious co-existence in spite of diversity; to raise morally upright and well-adjusted individuals who can think rationally, respect the views and feelings of others, we could see that on paper there seems to be no problem, and the policy is well couched. The national goal and objectives of education tallies with what educationists expect (Akpan and Udofia 72). Taking a critical look at all the subjects of instruction in the curriculum, it is imperative to say that there are gaps indeed with regard to the kind of subjects that can inculcate morals and imbue the minds of children to bring about the kind of results the national goal of education promises. National values should proceed from the underlying humanistic values of the society in question. But the contents of the national value as taught in our schools do not live up to the billing. Also, religious studies that one could say can influence the mind to fear God and behave rightly have contents that are

basically theological and sectional. It tends to divide people based on the faith professed than unite humans as links of reality to bring national unity. With these gaps, there is need for introduction of subjects that can affect the mind directly and inculcate a sort humanist mindset through critical thinking.

A curriculum of education should reflect first and foremost the humanist values of the society through the introduction of critical thinking. The traditional African humanist value is based on the spirit of complementarity which has to do with complementary mutual relationship between humans. If this kind of teaching is introduced into the curriculum and the children are made to understand the importance of the integrative principle in their existence, then it could help influence their dealings in life and how they view their environment. Critical thinking aims at open-mindedness or broadmindedness, where other people's culture and ideas are not simply jettisoned. It is a fact that lack of open-mindedness is one problem that is ruining the country today. With regard to the philosophy that underlies our policy of education, it is believed that if critical thinking is introduced, it could possibly pave the way for a new philosophy of education in Nigeria. As a product of critical thinking, and since Asouzu's notion of noetic propaedeutic pedagogy hinges on ontological humanistic values; and basically, focuses on cognitive and volitional aspects of the subjects, it is believed that it has the capacity to engender learners who could internalize its dictates towards character development. This would help deal with the prevalent attitudes of selfishness, egoism, graft, nepotism and all forms of social vices that have become rooted even in children with a tendency to destroy the Nigerian unity.

Open-mindedness and fair-mindedness as the best conditions for critical thinking pedagogy. Open-mindedness, which is the willingness to consider ideas and opinion that are new or different from one's own implies that no matter one's ethnic affiliation, one should be open to the ideas and opinions of others especially when those ideas would better the lots of the Nigerian citizens if adopted. It is no doubt that Nigeria is far from being united due to ethnic closed-mindedness, where the views of others are not regarded except the views of the group that considers itself superior. Fair-mindedness which is the ability to make judgement free from discrimination or dishonesty, entails a consciousness of the need to treat all viewpoints alike without reference to one's feelings or what one or the group stands to gain from such. In practical term, ethnic groups in Nigeria should be impartial enough to welcome reasonable view point without prejudice inasmuch as citizens want Nigeria to be united and progressive. This is case when all ethnic groups in Nigeria would see beyond ethnic cleavage and to consider everyone in the nation as brothers and sisters. This calls for fellow-feeling; a feeling that will unite the nation. To achieve the above, critical thinking pedagogy must be made part and parcel of Nigeria's educational curriculum from the secondary school level and infused into the general studies programme for undergraduates. This will help the citizens to think Nigeria, work collectively as a people with one national common goal, and see Nigeria's diversity of tribes or ethnicity as an asset rather than liability.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, the quest for national integration is an important, serious and demanding task. Following the results of this interrogation, certain facts are clear namely that Nigeria has been subject to centrifugal forces of me and my ethnic group ideology. The relationship that exists among ethnic groups in Nigeria is far from being nationalistic, rather, ethnic-centered. Ethnic groups tend to show much concern to their in-groups while less concern is shown to other groups; hence, enthronement of ethnic nationalism. This has informed decisions that tend to favour some ethnic groups while discriminating against others. It is therefore, not surprising that Nigeria has experienced agitations from myriads of resistant groups, movements or militias as national good or unity is sacrificed on the altar of ethnic interest. This has affected the progressive development of the nation socially, economically and politically in spite of the nation's enviable human and natural resources, and has left the nation on the verge of disintegration.

In line with above, critical thinking pedagogy will go a long way to serve as a tool in combating the menace of ethnic discrimination. Paul and Elder opined that critical thinking is the art of analysing and evaluating thinking with the view to improving it (2). This higher level of thinking will help Nigerians to examine the stereotypes, prejudices and biases acquired from their different ethnic backgrounds and question them. Since many have been brainwashed with unfriendly and discriminatory ideologies and beliefs, they tend to be socio-centric so much so that what matters most to them is what concerns their in-group. They no longer evaluate their actions to know whether it is for the common good or only for the good of the group they belong. Critical thinking, therefore, helps one and ethnic groups to evaluate ideas and reasons logically so as to draw reasonable conclusions about things of national relevance. For one and/or an ethnic group to cultivate a critical thinking mindset, one must imbibe and cultivate its principles such as open-mindedness, fair-mindedness and empathy as explained above. This paper promotes inclusive dialogue, respect for diversity, and a shared national identity.

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