



## **Examining the Relevance of Multicultural Education in Mitigating Prejudice and Promoting Political Integration in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

The thrust of this paper is on, examining the relevance of multicultural education in mitigating prejudice and promoting political integration in Nigeria. The research design adopted is literature review. Information were sourced from secondary sources like published work, research papers and documentaries including oral interviews from a wide range of sources like university libraries, lecturers in the Departments of Political Sciences, History and International Studies and Departments of Social Studies and Civic Education, respectively. The Pluralism theory was used and its relevance in the study is because it articulates how diverse groups within a society can co-exist harmoniously while preserving their unique identities. The findings indicate there's non-adherence to the Federal Character Principle and that multicultural education promotes greater tolerance, diminishes ethnocentric tendencies, and enhances inclusive political engagement. Nevertheless, its impact is constrained by poor curriculum implementation, political interference, and socio-cultural barriers. The study concludes that the integration of multicultural education into Nigeria's formal and informal educational structures is vital for achieving sustainable peace and national development. Therefore, we recommend that the citizens be educated in multicultural education which emphasizes the need for her citizens to value cultural differences and reject discriminatory beliefs.

*Keywords: multicultural education, prejudice, national integration, federal character principle and national development*

### **Introduction**

In the rapidly evolving global landscape, the need for multicultural education has become paramount. Multicultural education, which aims to provide students with a broad understanding of different cultures and promote respect for diversity, is especially crucial in a country like Nigeria with its rich tapestry of ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversities. Nigeria from its prehistoric record is an amalgam of different ethnic nationalities, with a plethora of cultural, religious and traditional diversities, in effect, Nigeria is a plural society. Nigeria ranks among Africa's most culturally diverse nations, encompassing over 250 ethnic groups, each with unique languages,

religious beliefs, and socio-cultural traditions. Obinanasor, Ezeji and Onyeocha, (2025) observed that while this diversity presents substantial opportunities for national development, it has equally served as a significant driver of division, mistrust, and recurrent conflict. Historical factors, including colonial amalgamation, uneven regional development, and the political exploitation of ethnic and religious identities, have entrenched prejudice and structural fragmentation within the Nigerian polity (Okeke, 2020; Onwuka, 2021).

Onwuka, (2021) in the author's discuss on prejudice observed that in Nigeria prejudice typically surfaces along ethnic, religious, and regional lines, shaping social relations, access to resources, and political conduct. These biases extend beyond interpersonal interactions and are firmly institutionalised in key sectors such as education, governance, and employment. As a result, practices such as ethnic favouritism, religious intolerance, and regional marginalisation continue to erode national cohesion and political stability.

Ofoha, (2019) defined political integration as the process of forging diverse groups into a unified and effective political system remains a formidable challenge in Nigeria. Although successive governments have introduced initiatives such as the Federal Character Principle, Unity Schools, and the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in attempt to curb prejudice and enhance national integration, but they are observed profound divisions among citizens of various cultural and religious diversities in the country. These divisions frequently manifest in electoral violence, policy scepticism, and a fragile national identity, all of which impede effective governance and sustainable development (Ogbu, 2018; Ofoha, 2019; Okeke, 2020).

Nwagwu, (2018) saw education is widely acknowledged as a potent instrument for social transformation. Multicultural education, in particular, aims to cultivate understanding, respect, and appreciation of cultural diversities. It advocates for inclusive curricula, equitable representation of cultures, and the cultivation of critical thinking skills capable of confronting stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes. Through systematic exposure to varied cultural perspectives, multicultural education holds considerable promise for diminishing prejudice and nurturing a shared national

identity.

Nnadi, (2022) observed that the effective implementation of multicultural education and its tangible impact on reducing prejudice and advancing political integration in Nigeria remain insufficiently examined. Although existing policies recognise cultural diversity, empirical evidence demonstrating how educational interventions produce meaningful attitudinal and behavioural changes among citizens is limited. It is within this context that the present study investigates the relevance of multicultural education as a mechanism for mitigating prejudice and fostering political integration in Nigeria. The research seeks to bridge the divide between educational theory and prevailing socio-political realities, thereby offering actionable insights for policy development and educational reform directed at reinforcing national unity.

Despite sustained efforts by successive administrations to advance national unity, Nigeria continues to contend with entrenched ethnic, religious, and regional divisions. These divisions have perpetuated various forms of prejudice, resulting in widespread discrimination, social exclusion, and recurrent conflicts across the nation. Such biased attitudes not only strain interpersonal relations among citizens but also erode public confidence in national institutions and the overall legitimacy of the political system. Mechanisms designed to promote integration, including the Federal Character Principle, unity schools, and various inter-state initiatives, have yielded only modest outcomes. In many instances, these interventions focus primarily on structural adjustments while falling short of transforming the underlying attitudes and perceptions that fuel prejudice. Consequently, many citizens continue to place ethnic and religious loyalties above national identity, thereby obstructing substantive political integration (Nwagwu, 2018).

Nnadi, (2022) posited that education is widely recognised as a vital instrument for moulding values, attitudes, and social behaviour. However, Nigeria's educational system has been critiqued for its insufficient focus on cultural inclusivity and its limited capacity to address issues of diversity and prejudice in a systematic manner. Although references to multicultural education appear in certain policy documents, their implementation remains inconsistent and, at times, largely superficial. Moreover, there is a notable shortage of robust empirical research investigating the influence of

multicultural education on attitudes towards diversity and its contribution to political integration in the Nigerian context. In the absence of such evidence, policymakers and educators face challenges in developing targeted interventions that effectively tackle the root causes of prejudice.

This study therefore addresses the persistent challenge of widespread prejudice and weak political integration in Nigeria, notwithstanding existing educational and policy measures. Specifically, it seeks to ascertain whether and to what degree multicultural education can function as an effective strategy for reducing prejudice and building a more cohesive and integrated political system.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of this study is to examine the relevance of multicultural education in mitigating prejudice and promoting political integration in Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Assess the extent to which multicultural education influences the reduction of ethnic, religious, and cultural prejudice among Nigerians.
2. Examine the role of multicultural education in fostering political integration and a sense of national identity among citizens.
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of the current educational curriculum and policies in promoting multicultural values and inclusivity in Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent does multicultural education contribute to the reduction of ethnic, religious, and cultural prejudice in Nigeria?
2. How does multicultural education influence political integration and the development of a unified national identity among Nigerians?
3. How effective are the existing educational curricula and policies in promoting multicultural values and inclusivity in Nigeria?

Research Question 1: Multicultural Education can go a long way in mitigating prejudice. Those interviewed stated that the syndrome of prejudice will be obliterated in Nigeria if multicultural

education is harnessed. The observer's finding is not different from the results gotten from the interview method, and the observation shows that harnessing multicultural education will greatly eliminate prejudice in the Nigerian society. Their position is in line with the Pluralism theory because it articulates how diverse groups within a society can co-exist harmoniously while preserving their unique identities. The respondents, like the theory reject the notion that national unity necessitates cultural uniformity, instead in their view it should embody diversity, inclusion and mutual respect as the bedrock of social stability and political order.

Research Question 2: "Multicultural education will likely promote political integration". Information from the interview (qualitative) conducted, based on the research question revealed that forty-five of the teachers interviewed accepted that multicultural education undoubtedly, will promote political integration in a diverse country such as Nigeria. The researchers position are in tandem with the reviewed materials that by fostering understanding, tolerance and respect for diversity, it can help transform attitudes and nurture shared national identities. In addition, the observation made by the researcher from the three universities equally gave credence to the findings; that incontrovertibly, multicultural education enhances the promotion of political integration in Nigeria. The two approaches used here all revealed the same findings, going by this, it means multicultural education can be harnessed to mitigate prejudice and promote political integration in Nigeria.

### **Multicultural education**

Nwagwu, (2018) on the author's discourse on multicultural education observed that multicultural education is an instructional approach that acknowledges, values, and deliberately integrates the diverse cultural backgrounds of learners into the teaching and learning process. It aims to advance equity, inclusivity, and mutual respect among individuals from varied ethnic, religious, linguistic, and social groups. Instead of presenting knowledge through a single dominant cultural lens, it incorporates multiple perspectives, enabling learners to develop a more balanced and comprehensive understanding of society. The author went further to posit that fundamentally, multicultural education seeks to confront stereotypes, minimise prejudice, and cultivate positive

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intergroup relations. It prioritises the development of critical thinking skills that empower learners to interrogate biased narratives, identify social inequalities, and appreciate cultural differences. The approach also instills core democratic values, including tolerance, social justice, and respect for human dignity qualities that are indispensable for peaceful coexistence in a pluralistic society such as Nigeria (Nieto & Bode, 2018; Nnadi, 2022).

Musa, (2023) in his study observed that multicultural education functions through several key dimensions. First, content integration entails embedding diverse cultural perspectives into the curriculum across disciplines such as history, literature, and social studies, thereby exposing learners to the contributions and experiences of different cultural groups. Second, knowledge construction helps students recognise how cultural assumptions shape the creation of knowledge, thereby promoting critical awareness. Third, prejudice reduction focuses on building positive attitudes towards people from other backgrounds through carefully designed learning experiences. Fourth, equity pedagogy involves modifying teaching strategies to accommodate diverse learning styles and cultural contexts. Finally, empowering school culture entails establishing an institutional environment that upholds inclusivity and equal opportunities for all learners.

Musa, (2023) further observed that in the Nigerian context, multicultural education holds particular significance given the country's intricate cultural landscape, which includes over 250 ethnic groups and multiple religious affiliations. The necessity for an educational system that effectively promotes unity in diversity is therefore paramount. Although national policies, such as the National Policy on Education, endorse national integration and cultural awareness, their practical application frequently remains limited due to resource constraints, inadequate teacher preparation, and insufficient curriculum refinement. Importantly, multicultural education extends beyond formal classroom settings. It encompasses co-curricular activities, intercultural engagements, language policies, and community-based initiatives that facilitate dialogue and collaboration across groups. When properly executed, it can effectively dismantle deep-rooted prejudices by nurturing empathy, respect, and shared national values.

In essence, multicultural education represents more than a theoretical framework; it constitutes a powerful transformative instrument capable of reshaping societal attitudes and bolstering political integration in Nigeria. Its value lies in its capacity to address the underlying causes of division through enhanced understanding and acceptance across cultural lines.

### **Prejudices in Nigeria**

Eze, (2021) posited that prejudice in the Nigerian context as best understood as a complex psychological and social construct characterized by preconceived often negative attitudes toward individuals or groups based on their ethnic, religious, cultural or regional identities rather than on objective evaluation of their character. Nigeria's pluralistic composition, with over 250 ethnic groups and diverse religious affiliations, provides fertile ground for the development and persistence of such biased orientations. These attitudes are frequently expressed as stereotypes, suspicion, and social distance, reflecting what scholars describe as a "fear of difference" rooted in both historical and contemporary realities (Whitley & Kite, 2019; Dovidio et al., 2020).

Musa, (2023) found that the persistence of prejudice in Nigeria is closely tied to structural and historical dynamics. Colonial administrative systems, regional inequalities, and post-independence political competition have contributed to entrenched intergroup divisions. In addition, competition over scarce resources such as political power, land and economic opportunities intensifies group-based bias and reinforces negative perceptions of "others" (Osaghae, 2018; Mustapha, 2021). These conditions encourage the formation of generalized labels and stereotypes that simplify complex identities, such as associating particular ethnic groups with fixed behavioral traits. Although such characterizations are often inaccurate, they shape public attitudes and influence patterns of interaction across social and political spaces.

Falola and Heaton, (2022) from their psychological standpoint observed that prejudice is sustained by limited intergroup contact and the human tendency to categorize people into in-groups and out-groups. Social Identity Theory explains that individuals derive a sense of belonging and self-worth from their group affiliations, which can lead to favoritism toward one's own group and bias against others (Hewstone et al., 2018). Where interaction between groups is minimal or conflict-driven,

these biases are reinforced rather than challenged. This helps explain why religious prejudice, particularly between Christians and Muslims, continues to manifest in mutual distrust and periodic tension in different parts of the country (Falola & Heaton, 2022).

Kurdi and Banaji, (2019) went further to posit that prejudice also operates through multiple dimensions cognitive, affective, and behavioral. Cognitively, it involves stereotypes or beliefs about a group; affectively, it includes emotions such as fear or hostility; and behaviorally, it manifests as discrimination or exclusion (Dovidio et al., 2020). In Nigeria, these dimensions are evident in everyday social interactions, employment practices, and even access to political opportunities. Importantly, prejudice is not always overt; implicit biases often shape decisions and attitudes unconsciously, making them more difficult to detect and address (Kurdi & Banaji, 2019).

Kurdi and Banaji, (2019) went further to state that a key factor in the reproduction of prejudice is socialization. Families, peer groups, religious institutions, and the media all contribute to shaping perceptions about other groups. When these sources transmit biased or incomplete narratives, individuals internalize such views from an early age. The education system, therefore, plays a critical role: when curricula lack cultural inclusivity or fail to challenge stereotypes, they may inadvertently reinforce existing prejudices instead of dismantling them (Banks, 2020; UNESCO, 2021).

Kurdi and Banaji, (2019) stated that effort to address prejudice requires deliberate and sustained interventions that target its root causes. Educational approaches that emphasize inclusivity, critical thinking, and intercultural understanding have been shown to reduce bias and promote more positive intergroup relations. Structured intergroup contact, when based on cooperation and equality, can foster empathy and weaken stereotypes, thereby improving social cohesion (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2018; UNESCO, 2021). In a diverse society like Nigeria, such strategies are essential for transforming attitudes and building mutual trust across cultural boundaries. For students in this field, examining prejudice equips them with the analytical skills needed to design communication strategies, educational policies, and media interventions that foster tolerance, empathy, and national

cohesion.

Banks, (2015) found that expanding on this conceptual foundation, prejudice in Nigeria extends beyond individual attitudes to become a structural and systemic phenomenon that permeates multiple layers of social life and acts as a significant barrier to national cohesion and development. It is often expressed through entrenched stereotypes, intergroup suspicion, and patterns of exclusion that are reinforced by broader socio-economic inequalities. Uneven development across regions, alongside persistent disputes over resource allocation and political representation, intensifies these divisions and sustains a climate of mistrust among groups (Osaghae, 2018; Mustapha, 2021). In such contexts, prejudice is not incidental but embedded in the everyday functioning of society, influencing access to opportunities and shaping collective perceptions.

Banks (2015) further added that from a psychological perspective, these prejudicial attitudes are maintained by fear of the unfamiliar and limited opportunities for meaningful intergroup engagement. When individuals have little or no direct interaction with members of other ethnic or religious groups, they are more likely to rely on inherited beliefs and socially constructed narratives, thereby reinforcing cycles of bias. This helps explain why ethnic and religious loyalties often take precedence over national identity in Nigeria, as group affiliations provide a sense of security and belonging in a fragmented social environment (Hewstone et al., 2018; Dovidio et al., 2020).

In Adeyemi, (2020) view the dynamics of prejudice can be further understood through Social Identity Theory, which posits that individuals naturally categorize themselves and others into in-groups and out-groups, leading to favoritism toward one's own group and bias against others. In the Nigerian setting, this tendency frequently manifests in ethnic favoritism, political patronage, and the marginalization of groups perceived as outsiders (Hewstone et al., 2018). Such patterns are particularly evident in areas where social interactions are largely homogeneous, as individuals may grow up with limited exposure to cultural diversity and instead depend on second-hand information shaped by family, community, or media narratives.

This author further observed that prejudice in Nigeria is often intersectional in nature, meaning that

it does not operate along a single axis of identity. Ethnic and religious biases frequently intersect with other forms of discrimination, such as gender inequality and the marginalization of minority groups. Women from minority ethnic backgrounds, for instance, may experience compounded exclusion, while smaller cultural groups often find their histories and contributions underrepresented in national discourse (Crenshaw, 2019; UNESCO, 2021). This layered form of prejudice deepens inequality and makes it more difficult to achieve inclusive development.

Adebayo, (2021) found that these realities underscore the fact that prejudice is fundamentally a learned social behavior, transmitted through processes of socialization and reinforced by structural conditions. As such, addressing it requires deliberate and sustained interventions rather than isolated efforts. Educational strategies that promote intercultural understanding, empathy, and critical reflection are particularly important in breaking the cycle of inherited bias. By encouraging perspective-taking and facilitating meaningful interaction across group boundaries, such approaches can help humanize perceived differences and gradually weaken the influence of historical grievances on contemporary social relations (Banks, 2020; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2018).

The shift from social bias into the political arena represents a critical intensification of division in Nigeria, as prejudice becomes institutionalized and strategically deployed in the struggle for power and resource control. In this context, political prejudice refers to the expression of bias through identity-driven political behavior, including voting patterns, public appointments, and policy preferences shaped primarily by ethnic or religious affiliation rather than competence or national interest. Contemporary studies note that Nigeria's political space is deeply influenced by such identity cleavages, which continue to structure participation and representation in governance (Mustapha, 2021; Suberu, 2019).

Osagie (2018) and Ibrahim, (2020) also found that one of the most visible manifestations of political prejudice is bloc voting, where citizens align their electoral choices with candidates who share their ethnic or religious identity. While this behavior may provide a sense of group security, it often undermines democratic ideals by shifting attention away from merit, policy competence, and

accountability. As a result, elections are frequently interpreted as contests between competing groups rather than opportunities for collective national decision-making. This dynamic reinforces what scholars describe as a “zero-sum” perception of politics, where the success of one group is seen as the loss of another, thereby deepening intergroup mistrust (Osaghae, 2018; Ibrahim, 2020). Mustapha, (2021) concluded that political elites play a significant role in sustaining this system. By appealing to ethnic and religious sentiments, they mobilize support and consolidate power, often at the expense of national cohesion. Such strategies make citizens more susceptible to divisive rhetoric and weaken issue-based political engagement. Instead of fostering inclusive governance, this approach entrenches sectional interests and legitimizes favoritism in the distribution of public resources and opportunities (Suberu, 2019; Mustapha, 2021). Consequently, state policies and appointments are frequently interpreted through the lens of group advantage, fueling perceptions of marginalization and exclusion among other communities.

The broader implications of political prejudice are profound. It erodes trust in democratic institutions, weakens national identity, and contributes to cycles of instability. Groups that perceive themselves as excluded from political power or resource distribution may resort to agitation or resistance, as seen in various separatist movements and communal conflicts across the country. Such developments threaten the foundations of democratic consolidation by undermining legitimacy and social cohesion (Falola & Heaton, 2022).

Mustapha, (2021) further observed that political prejudice reframes governance as a competition for ethnic entitlement rather than a platform for collective progress. When political office and national resources are viewed primarily through group-based claims, the idea of shared citizenship is weakened. This makes the process of political integration where citizens prioritize loyalty to the state over narrower identities particularly challenging. Achieving such integration requires not only institutional reforms but also a transformation in political culture, where diversity is managed through inclusion rather than exploitation.

Expanding to its structural implications, political prejudice in Nigeria functions as a powerful driver of democratic erosion and persistent instability. It is not confined to individual attitudes but is

embedded within institutions and governance practices, shaping how power is distributed and exercised. Ongoing debates around the federal character principle, for instance, reveal how attempts at ensuring inclusivity are often overshadowed by struggles for ethnic or regional dominance. In practice, what should promote balance can instead reinforce identity consciousness and competition, especially when implementation lacks transparency and merit-based safeguards (Suberu, 2019; Ibrahim, 2020).

Within this context, the logic of prebendalism—where public office is treated as a resource to be appropriated for the benefit of one’s group—remains highly influential in Nigerian politics. This orientation encourages officeholders to prioritize ethnic or religious constituencies over national development goals, thereby weakening accountability and institutional integrity. Scholars argue that such patterns distort governance by shifting attention from public service delivery to patronage distribution, ultimately undermining trust in the state (Mustapha, 2021; Osaghae, 2018).

A direct consequence of this system is the persistence of identity-driven voting, where electoral choices are shaped more by shared identity than by policy evaluation or competence. While this may provide short-term group assurance, it erodes the foundations of meritocracy and limits the emergence of issue-based politics. Over time, democratic processes become less about performance and more about representation of group interests, reducing the incentive for leaders to be accountable to the broader population (Ibrahim, 2020; Dode, 2020).

Beyond elections, political prejudice sustains a cycle of mistrust and conflict. Groups that perceive themselves as excluded from political power or resource distribution often interpret the state as biased or unrepresentative. This perception fuels separatist agitations, communal clashes, and resistance movements across different regions. Historical grievances—such as those linked to the civil war, resource control in the Niger Delta, or farmer–herder conflicts—intersect with contemporary struggles over oil revenue, land use, and political appointments, transforming economic concerns into highly polarized political disputes (Falola & Heaton, 2022; Mustapha, 2021).

Compounding the problem is the role of political elites, who frequently exploit these divisions for strategic advantage. By framing political competition in ethnic or religious terms, they mobilize support while deepening societal fragmentation. This manipulation makes democratic consolidation particularly fragile, as institutions struggle to function effectively in an environment characterized by suspicion and zero-sum thinking (Suberu, 2019).

Ultimately, political prejudice reshapes the relationship between citizens and the state. Instead of fostering a shared sense of national belonging and civic responsibility, it promotes narrow loyalties tied to ethnic or religious identity. The state is no longer perceived as a neutral arbiter serving collective interests but as an arena for group competition. This undermines efforts toward political integration, where allegiance to the nation should transcend sub-identities.

### **The Federal Character Principle**

The federal character principle, originally designed to ensure equitable representation of Nigeria's diverse groups, has also become a site of contestation. While its intent is to promote inclusivity, its implementation is often criticized for reinforcing identity consciousness and encouraging quota-based thinking rather than meritocratic standards. This paradox illustrates how institutional mechanisms, even when designed to manage diversity, can inadvertently sustain political prejudice if not carefully balanced (Ibrahim, 2020). The federal character principle in Nigeria is a constitutional mechanism designed to ensure that the composition of government institutions reflects the country's vast ethnic, religious, and regional diversity. First introduced in the 1979 Constitution and reaffirmed in the 1999 Constitution, the principle seeks to prevent the monopolization of political power and public institutions by a few dominant groups. By mandating that appointments, resource allocation, and public service representation are distributed across the federating units, it aims to promote inclusivity, national cohesion, and a sense of belonging among all citizens (Suberu, 2019; Ibrahim, 2020). In a plural society like Nigeria, such a framework is intended to manage diversity and reduce feelings of marginalization that could threaten political stability.

In practice, however, the implementation of the federal character principle has generated

considerable debate. A central concern is the tension between meritocracy and quota-based representation. While the policy is designed to ensure fairness and representation, critics argue that excessive emphasis on geographic or ethnic balancing can sometimes undermine competence and efficiency within public institutions. This has raised questions about the long-term impact of the principle on institutional performance and governance outcomes (Mustapha, 2021; Okeke, 2020). As a result, the principle is often caught between the need to promote equity and the necessity of maintaining high professional standards in public service.

Another challenge lies in how the principle is perceived and applied within Nigeria's broader political culture. Rather than serving purely as a unifying mechanism, it is sometimes viewed as a tool for sectional favoritism, reinforcing the very divisions it was designed to manage. Political actors may manipulate its provisions to justify preferential treatment for certain groups, thereby deepening ethnic and regional competition. This perception reflects the persistence of identity-based politics, where public policies are interpreted through the lens of group advantage rather than collective national interest (Osaghae, 2018; Suberu, 2019).

Moreover, the federal character principle tends to address the symptoms rather than the root causes of Nigeria's divisions. While it redistributes opportunities and representation, it does not directly confront the underlying prejudices, stereotypes, and mistrust that shape intergroup relations. Consequently, its effectiveness in achieving deep political integration remains limited. Without parallel efforts to transform attitudes and promote mutual understanding, structural mechanisms alone cannot fully resolve the challenges of national unity (Ibrahim, 2020; UNESCO, 2021).

For this reason, many scholars argue that the principle should be complemented by transformative social interventions, particularly in the field of education. Approaches such as multicultural education can play a crucial role in addressing the psychological and cultural foundations of prejudice by fostering empathy, intercultural competence, and a shared sense of identity among citizens (Banks, 2020; UNESCO, 2021). When combined with institutional frameworks like the federal character principle, such efforts offer a more holistic strategy for promoting both equity and

unity.

### **Non-adherence to the Federal Character Principle**

in Nigeria represents a serious deviation from the constitutional framework designed to manage diversity and promote inclusive governance. When this principle is ignored or inconsistently applied, it weakens national cohesion and reinforces long-standing patterns of inequality and exclusion. Rather than serving as a stabilizing mechanism, the absence of equitable representation in public institutions often intensifies the “persistent tensions” and governance challenges that have characterized Nigeria’s political development since independence (Suberu, 2019; Mustapha, 2021). In such situations, the concentration of political power and economic opportunities within particular ethnic or religious groups undermines the foundational objective of preventing dominance by any single bloc.

Mustapha, (2021) one of the most immediate consequences of non-adherence is the perception of political exclusion. When appointments, infrastructure, and public resources appear unevenly distributed, marginalized groups may interpret the state as biased or unrepresentative. This perception has historically contributed to separatist agitations, regional unrest, and recurring ethno-religious conflicts in different parts of the country (Osaghae, 2018; Falola & Heaton, 2022). In this way, failure to uphold inclusive principles does not merely create dissatisfaction—it can escalate into broader political instability.

Closely linked to this is the erosion of national identity. When citizens observe persistent imbalance in representation, their loyalty to the state may weaken, while ethnic and religious affiliations become more salient. Over time, this dynamic reinforces a fragmented sense of belonging, where individuals identify primarily with sub-national groups rather than with Nigeria as a unified entity (Ibrahim, 2020). Such conditions make it difficult to cultivate shared citizenship and collective responsibility. Non-adherence also contributes to the intensification of political prejudice. When groups perceive governance outcomes as favoring certain identities, political competition increasingly adopts a zero-sum character—where one group’s gain is interpreted as another’s loss. This perception deepens mistrust and encourages identity-based political behavior, including bloc

voting and sectional mobilization, which further weakens democratic norms and accountability (Dode, 2020; Suberu, 2019).

Another major implication is the growth of institutional distrust. Public institutions that fail to reflect the diversity of the society risk losing legitimacy in the eyes of citizens. When it is observed that federal agencies and decision-making bodies are perceived as exclusionary, then confidence in the political process declines, reducing civic engagement and weakening the effectiveness of governance structures (Mustapha, 2021). This distrust can create a cycle where citizens disengage from formal institutions and instead rely on ethnic or informal networks for representation and support.

Beyond these immediate effects, the inconsistent application of the federal character principle highlights deeper systemic issues. Although the policy exists as a formal mechanism for managing diversity, it is often implemented in a way that addresses surface-level imbalances rather than underlying prejudices. Without addressing the attitudinal and cultural roots of division, such as stereotypes and intergroup suspicion, structural solutions alone cannot achieve lasting integration (UNESCO, 2021; Banks, 2020). This gap allows ethnocentric politics to persist, filling the vacuum created by weak institutional trust. Ultimately, the failure to adhere to inclusive frameworks like the federal character principle reinforces cycles of exclusion, prejudice, and political fragmentation. For Nigeria to achieve sustainable unity and democratic stability, adherence to such constitutional provisions must be complemented by long-term strategies that promote equity, transparency, and intercultural understanding.

### **Political Integration**

Political integration is the process by which diverse social, ethnic, religious, and cultural groups within a nation are unified into a cohesive and functional political system. It entails cultivating a shared sense of belonging, common political values, and equitable participation in governance irrespective of individual or group differences. Essentially, political integration aims to convert diversity from a potential source of division into a foundation for collective national identity and

enduring stability.

In Nigeria, political integration is both an imperative and a formidable challenge, given the country's highly pluralistic character. Since independence, various policies and institutional mechanisms have been introduced to promote unity. These include the federal system of government, the Federal Character Principle, the establishment of unity schools, and the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), all intended to foster inclusiveness, equitable representation, and intergroup engagement. Nevertheless, the attainment of genuine political integration continues to remain elusive. A critical measure of political integration is the degree to which citizens prioritise national identity over sub-national affiliations such as ethnicity or religion. In Nigeria, however, loyalty to ethnic and religious groups frequently overrides national allegiance. This pattern is evident in voting behaviour, political appointments, and public discourse, where identity considerations often take precedence over merit and national interest.

Another vital aspect is inclusive political participation. True political integration demands that all groups feel adequately represented and possess equal opportunities to engage in governance. Yet, perceptions of marginalisation and exclusion remain widespread, with certain groups believing they are inadequately represented in political and economic structures. Such perceptions often result in political apathy, distrust in government institutions, and, in extreme cases, demands for autonomy or secession. Political integration further requires the development of shared norms and values, including respect for the rule of law, tolerance, and adherence to democratic principles. When prejudice and discrimination prevail, these shared values are undermined, contributing to political instability and conflict. Electoral violence and intergroup clashes, for example, are frequently rooted in underlying prejudices that weaken democratic processes.

Moreover, effective political integration relies on social cohesion and mutual trust among citizens. Trust emerges when individuals perceive the system as fair, just, and equitable. Persistent prejudice, however, erodes this trust, thereby impeding cooperation and collective action. In this context, multicultural education assumes considerable relevance. By fostering understanding, tolerance, and respect for diversity, it can help transform attitudes and nurture a shared national identity.

Individuals educated to value cultural differences and reject discriminatory beliefs are more inclined to participate constructively in politics and endorse inclusive policies. Thus, political integration in Nigeria extends beyond structural and institutional reforms; it is equally a psychological and cultural endeavour. Addressing it effectively requires not only policy adjustments but also targeted initiatives to reshape societal attitudes—an objective for which multicultural education is particularly well suited.

### **National Integration Theories:**

National integration theories examine the processes through which diverse groups within a state develop a collective sense of identity, loyalty, and commitment to a shared political system. These theories hold particular relevance for multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies such as Nigeria, where unity is not automatic but must be deliberately cultivated and maintained.

### **Pluralism Theory**

Pluralism theory is a sociological and political framework that articulates how diverse groups within a society can coexist harmoniously while preserving their unique identities. It rejects the notion that national unity necessitates cultural uniformity, instead positing diversity, inclusion, and mutual respect as the bedrock of social stability and political order. In pluralist societies, power is not monopolised by any single group but is dispersed among multiple competing and collaborating entities. The theory is prominently associated with scholars such as Robert Dahl, who maintained that modern democratic systems function most effectively when various groups are afforded opportunities to participate in decision-making processes. According to pluralism, no particular ethnic, religious, or cultural group should exercise dominance over the political system. Rather, governance should accommodate the interests of diverse groups through negotiation, compromise, and equitable representation.

Adeyemi, (2020) found that a fundamental assumption of pluralism theory is that conflict is an inherent feature of diverse societies, yet it need not result in instability. When appropriately managed through institutional mechanisms such as democratic participation, the rule of law, and

inclusive governance structures diversity can become a source of strength, fostering innovation, accountability, and balanced development. With respect to cultural diversity, pluralism affirms the validity of multiple identities within a single political entity. It posits that individuals can simultaneously uphold ethnic, religious, and national identities without inherent conflict. This viewpoint is especially pertinent in Nigeria, where citizens frequently navigate overlapping identities that shape their social and political conduct.

Pluralism further underscores the significance of tolerance and intercultural dialogue. It advocates moving beyond stereotypes and prejudices by cultivating understanding and cooperation across groups. This orientation resonates strongly with the goals of multicultural education, which endeavours to acquaint learners with diverse cultural perspectives and instill respect for differences. Nevertheless, pluralism theory also recognises inherent challenges, including unequal power relations among groups and the potential for fragmentation when diversity is poorly managed. In contexts where certain groups exert disproportionate control over political or economic resources, pluralist principles may be undermined, resulting in marginalisation and discontent among less influential segments.

In the Nigerian context, pluralism offers a valuable analytical lens for comprehending the complexities of diversity management. It supports the principle that national unity does not demand the erasure of cultural differences, but rather their effective accommodation within a fair and inclusive political framework. Consequently, multicultural education emerges as a practical instrument for translating pluralist ideals into reality by enhancing awareness, diminishing prejudice, and promoting constructive intergroup relations. In summary, pluralism theory reinforces the proposition that sustainable political integration in Nigeria hinges on the recognition and judicious management of diversity. It supplies a robust conceptual foundation for this study's emphasis on multicultural education as a strategic means of mitigating prejudice and advancing national cohesion.

## **Conclusion**

The findings gotten from the study supports the Pluralism theory which articulates how diverse

groups within a society can co-exist harmoniously while preserving their unique identities. It rejects the notion that national unity necessitates cultural uniformity, instead positing diversity, inclusion and mutual respect as the bedrock of social stability and political order. From the materials the researcher reviewed, trust emerges when individuals perceive the system as fair, just and equitable while persistent prejudice however, erodes this trust thereby, impeding cooperation and collective action. The researcher is compelled to conclude that multicultural education assumes considerable relevance. By fostering understanding, tolerance and respect for diversity, it can help transform attitudes and nurture shared national identities. Individuals educated to value cultural differences and reject discriminatory beliefs are more inclined to participate constructively in politics and endorse inclusive policies.

### **Recommendations**

1. The teaching of multicultural education should be strongly integrated into all school curricula, at all levels. That is, comprehensive curriculum reforms, enhanced teacher training programmes.
2. Government policies and programmes should be seen to be fair, just, equitable and stricter policy enforcement to foster cultural inclusivity and civic responsibility.
3. Citizens should be educated to value cultural differences and reject discriminatory beliefs, in order to be inclined to participate constructively in politics thereby, promoting political integration.

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