

Educational Practices for a New Nigeria: An Exploratory Study

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This article reports on a qualitative study conducted at the Nigerian Turkish International Colleges (NTICs) in Abuja, Nigeria. Twenty-two participants comprised of three administrators, seven teachers, four parents, and eight students participated in the study. The data collected through observations, informal, formal and semi-structured in-depth individual interviews, focus groups, document analysis (of teachers' syllabi, coursework materials, Nigerian nationwide exam reports, and copies of district and state lesson design guidelines), and field notes were used for content analysis. Themes of the study were constructed to explore the schools' role in promoting openness, mutual understanding, and habits of discourse vital to democracy in a society that is deeply divided along religious, ethnic, and geographical lines. This article explains the value of NTICs by focusing on the role of curriculum in promoting tolerance, unity, economic prosperity, and stability. This article also considers how these NTICs attempt to encourage the establishment of a civil society based upon democratic principles of governance while focusing on multicultural values.

Cet article présente les résultats d'une étude entreprise aux Nigerian Turkish International Colleges (NTICs) à Abuja, au Nigeria. L'étude a impliqué 22 participants, dont trois administrateurs, sept enseignants, quatre parents et huit étudiants. Les données ont été recueillies lors de séances d'observation, d'entrevues individuelles approfondies (informelles, formelles et semi-structurées), de groupes de discussion, d'analyse documentaire (plans de cours des professeurs, matériel de cours, rapports portant sur des examens à l'échelle du Nigeria, lignes directrices de la part des districts et de l'état pour la conception des cours) et par des notes prises sur le terrain. Les thèmes élaborés pour l'étude visaient l'exploration du rôle de l'école dans la promotion de l'ouverture, la compréhension mutuelle et les habitudes de discours essentielles à la démocratie dans une société qui est profondément divisée selon des clivages religieux, ethniques et géographiques. Cet article explique la valeur des NTICs en se penchant sur le rôle des programmes d'études dans la promotion de la tolérance, l'unité, la prospérité économique et la stabilité. De plus, il considère les efforts de ces NTICs pour encourager l'établissement d'une société civile reposant sur des principes démocratiques de gouvernance tout en tenant compte de valeurs multiculturelles.

Introduction

In Turkey, "in the 1980's, a shortage of high quality schools inspired the development of new educational institutions. These institutions were established by a new middle class with aspirations for higher education for its children" (Aydin, 2013a, p. 1). Aslandogan (2009) argued

that “even before the schools were opened, dormitories were built for the youth who came from out of town so they could attend the existing schools” (p. 2) and this was followed by the creation of secondary schools for students in grades 9 to 12. These schools, “like their public and private counterparts, engaged in teaching the common school disciplines” (Aydin, 2013a, p. 2). The reasons for both the educational deficiencies observed by some in today’s generation, as well as the incompetence of public administrators, national leaders, and ills affecting many nations, lie in the prevailing conditions affecting education and the ways in which teachers have taught over many years (Cetin, 2009). Likewise, those who also are charged with educating today’s young people should understand themselves, at least in part, to be responsible for the way that youth will grow to affect societies. Those people who wish to foresee a nation’s future can acceptably do so by analyzing the education and upbringing of its young people (Aydin, 2011; Yavuz, 2013). Several studies have been conducted on Turkish schools world-wide, however, Nigerian Turkish International Colleges (NTICs) have not been investigated by any researchers. Thus, the purpose of the study was to develop a portrait of the NTICs in Nigeria from the perspective of those involved in the schools. The study also intended to develop a robust understanding of life lived in conjunction with education and to look at the effects of NTICs in relation to problems in Nigerian society. Specifically, the following two research questions were addressed: (1) What are the perceptions of teachers, administrators, students, and parents at the schools? (2) To what extent do the graduates return to Nigeria after leaving the country for the further study? The purpose of the study was to develop a portrait of the NTICs in Nigeria from the perspective of those involved in the schools.

As one looks at the:

Nigerian educational environment, it is striking to notice that the nation is the location of both extraordinary wealth (one-fifth of U.S. oil comes from Nigeria) and crushing poverty. It is also true that education of reasonable quality is available for the wealthy people, but severely limited for the poor. (Aydin, 2013a, p. 2)

Dike (2008) emphasized that this is mainly due to the fact that, over the past several decades, Nigeria has been plagued by frequent political unrest. According to Odiya and Omofonmwan (as cited in Aydin, 2013a) Nigeria’s instability and economic inequality have generated negative effects on the education system, which are largely the result of corruption in all governmental agencies, including those responsible for education, and insufficient implementation of effective programs, lack of educational resources, poor funding, inadequately equipped classrooms, lack of qualified teachers, and a host of other problems.

NTICs are one of the prominent players in this educational restructuring enterprise. NTICs started in 1998 in a rented building with three students and thirteen teachers. These schools do operate as a secular alternative to the public schools and the other private schools that are more closely allied to particular religious and ethnic/tribal institutions in Nigeria. The schools are private institutions operating under an agreement with the Nigerian Government and they are run by Surat Educational Institutions Limited (Aydin, 2013b). Surat operates several campuses around Nigeria and other parts of West Africa, with most campuses containing a pre-school, an elementary school, and one or more secondary schools. NTICs in Nigeria enroll students from 191 different tribal/ethnic backgrounds, Christians and Muslims, northerners and southerners, the rich and the poor. This amounts to a variety of people in a nation in which the divisions are writ large and conflict is understood to be a way of life (Aydin, 2013). The study, then, provides a

window into what seems to be successful multicultural education occurring within the worst of contexts (Kaya, 2015; Koc-Damgaci, 2014). In addition, by 2011, there were 17 pre-college schools located in six different states, the one in Abuja, Nigeria's capital, and the others in Lagos, Kanu, Kaduna, Yobe, and Ponta states. These schools aim to empower youth through the promotion of educational programs intended to produce students who will lead the kind of society that will make Nigeria a better place to live (Aydin & Chandler, 201).

Leadership Problems in Nigeria

In Nigeria, one of the major challenges facing the nation over the years is corruption and its debilitating ancillaries—bribery, fraud, and nepotism (Dike, 2008). Dike (2008) and Goldenberg (2006) underline that corruption has become so deep-seated in Nigeria that it has stunted growth in all areas and has been the primary reason behind the country's inability to move toward becoming a developed nation despite residing on one of the most oil rich pieces of land on the planet. According to Transparency International, an independent organization monitoring government corruption world-wide, Nigeria is among the five most corrupt nations in the world (Dike, 2008). Due to leadership problems involving corrupt government practices, most Nigerians suffer from poverty, lack of education, divisiveness that regularly leads to violence, and disease. According to Aljazeera (2011), in Jos state, hundreds of people were being killed in ethnic and religious violence related to larger issues related to political and economic power.

Violent conflicts in Jos state of Nigeria are not new and are often followed by heated arguments, inside the government and among citizens, regarding what happened and who was to blame (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, 2011). A good number of Nigerians, in government and outside government, state directly that the main cause of these violent clashes is ignorance and the corruption that it allows. Ignorance leads to mistrust, particularly between the Christians and Muslims, but also between people from different tribal backgrounds and geographical areas. They blame each other for the poverty and the mishandling of the nation's wealth. At the same time, the majority of the people live in relative peace—most of the time—and it is in peace they wish to live. Despite such wishes, danger is ever present and education is understood to be the means by which peace and a corruption free society will be created (Aydin, 2011).

According to the United Nations, Nigeria is one of the "Next Eleven" largest economies, one of eleven countries noted for having a high potential for becoming the world's largest economy in the 21st century and is a member of the Commonwealth of Nations (in Bellamy & Derouen, 2008). Nellor (2008) argues that the economy of Nigeria is one of the fastest growing in the world. The International Monetary Fund (2008) projected a growth rate of 9% in 2008 and 8.4% in 2009. Nigeria is also the world's eighth largest oil producer and, thus, Africa's richest country deriving 90 percent of its total annual income from oil exports (International Monetary Fund, 2008). Despite it possessing vast natural resources, the majority of Nigerians remain impoverished and live on less than one dollar a day because most of the wealth ends up in the hands of a few because of gross corruption and mismanagement of both resources and the economy. According to Goldenberg (2006), Nigeria does not provide adequate essential services nor has it built the essential social and physical infrastructure in large parts of the country necessary to ensure a minimum acceptable level of health, education, access to drinking water, and an adequate standard of living. The researchers entered the study with the belief that the clashes, the strife, the corruption, and the violence are related to leadership problems and that

these problems are related to poor education and the resulting illiteracy. Not so ironically, the problems schools face, it appears, are directly related to political corruption as monies allotted for education are regularly diverted from the schools by administrators (Falola & Heaton, 2008).

Methodology

Research Design

The methodology of this study is grounded in the field of qualitative study. A qualitative approach using a bounded case study provided the method of inquiry (Creswell, 2007). Case study approach was chosen to examine the schools because this design is considered “holistic and context based” (Patton, 2002, p. 446). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) argued that a qualitative case study is characterized by a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Thus, the purpose of this qualitative study was to seek greater understanding of participants’ perceptions of the educational programs sponsored by NTICs in Nigeria. In this qualitative research paradigm, narrative methods are used to understand the perspectives of participants, without manipulation by the researchers. These perspectives are thus grounded in an authentic context, rather than deriving them from artificial situations or contexts that may be contrived by outsiders. The strength of the research interview is to gain data from the respondents’ perspectives and not to elicit change among the respondents (DeSa, 2009). Current students, their parents and school alumni, teachers, and administrators from these schools were asked about their experiences with NTICs.

The study used both in-depth interviews and small focus groups and observations meant to explore the schools’ role in promoting openness, mutual understanding, and habits of discourse vital to democracy in a society that is deeply divided along religious, ethnic, and geographical lines. All information collected was analyzed and presented as a narrative portrait of the schools based on the research questions that guided the study. For reliability and validity of this qualitative case study, triangulation of data, use of a peer reviewer, and member-checking (audit-trail) were applied in this research as suggested by Creswell (2012) and Guba and Lincoln (1989). For triangulation of data, the research was collected from individual interviews, focus group interviews, class observations, and field notes. Triangulation of data occurs when research is collected from three or more sources or when researchers use multiple methods of data collection within a study (Olsen, 2010). The peer-reviewer aids the researcher in reflecting about the processes used, data collection, data analysis, findings, and conclusions (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Member-checking occurs during the process of data analysis. According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), member-checking is one of the single most crucial techniques for establishing credibility.

Participants and Recruitment Procedures

Interviews were conducted at various places including the head office of the NTICs in Abuja, at the homes of participants, at the respective participants’ schools, and in other places around the schools.

The ethnicity of Nigeria is so varied that there is no definition of a Nigerian beyond that of someone who lives within the borders of the country (Ojogwu, 2008; Ukpo, 1977). Nigeria is

probably one of the most diverse countries in the world with over two hundred fifty languages spoken and three main ethnic groups, none of which constitute a majority of the population (Ogundiya, 2009; Onigu, 1990; Ukiwo, 2005).

The fourth factor used to describe participants was their religious background. Religious affiliation in Nigeria is strongly related to ethnicity, with rather distinct regional divisions between ethnic groups. The northern states, dominated by the Hausa and Fulani groups, are predominantly Muslim while the southern states' ethnic groups have a large number of Christians (Aydin, 2013b; Encyclopedia of the Nations, 2009).

Participants in this study were 22 adults, 9 females and 13 males, aged 16 to 61 ($M= 28.9$) representing four different groups: teachers, students, administrators, and students' parents. The study took place in the spring of 2010. Interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis and in small focus groups to elicit the lived experiences of people involved with the schools. Interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. With permission from the participants, the researchers audio-taped all interviews and took field notes to supplement the recording. To

Table 1

Frequency Distribution for Gender of Participants

Stakeholders	Total Number of Participants	Gender (M/F)	Sample Pool (%)
Teachers	7	4/3	31.8
Students	8	5/3	36.4
Parents	4	2/2	18.2
Administrators	3	2/1	13.6
Total	22	13/9	100

Table 2

Representation of Participants' Race in Sample Schools

Ethnicity/Nationality-Tribe	Total Number of Participants	Percent
Turkish	6	27.3
Hausa-Fulani	5	22.7
Yoruba	4	18.2
Igbo	3	13.6
Other	4	18.2
Total	22	100

Table 3

Representation of Participants' Religion in Sample Schools

Religion	Total Number of Participants	Percent
Muslim	12	54.6
Christian	7	31.8
African-religions	2	9.1
Other	1	4.5
Total	22	100

ensure the safety and well-being of the participants, permission to conduct the study was submitted for approval to the University of Nevada, Reno Institutional Review Board (IRB).

The participants were recruited by an outside source, the former general director of NTICs, who was working at Nigerian Turkish International Colleges in Abuja during the spring of 2010. The researchers provided the general director with a brief description of the study and an information sheet. Using personal associations, the general director contacted potential participants of the four stakeholder groups and asked them if they might be interested in participating in a personal interview or focus group. Members who expressed interest in participating were asked to leave their names with the general director so that the researchers could contact them upon their arrival at the schools. The resulting group constituted *a sample of convenience* (Lonner & Berry, 1986). A snowball sampling method was also used to recruit other participants. The researchers chose a snowball sampling method because it has a lot of advantages as opposed to other sampling methods, specifically for international research (Glense, 2010). Snowball sampling entails selecting a few people who can identify other people who can identify still other people who might be good participants for a study (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). According to Creswell (2002), snowball sampling is an alternative way to grow a sample with informants suggesting others who may be of value to the study. This approach is most valuable when a study is carried on in a setting in which possible participants are scattered or not found in clusters (Heckathorn, 2002; Lunenburg & Irby, 2008; Snijders, 1992). In this case, the researchers lived at great distance from the research setting and knew no one who might be of use in providing useful data.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection beyond the interviews was collected through classroom observations, field notes, and engagement with school provided documents (Glense, 2010). Data collection consisted of four focus group interviews with teachers and students, seven individual interviews with parents and administrators, all of which used in-depth, open-ended questions. After collection, both individual and focus group interviews were transcribed. This provided a complete record of the discussions and facilitated data analysis. Next, the content of the interviews was analyzed, first to discover major themes by sorting for key words, and then by categorizing statements according to key words related to the themes. The categorized data was then analyzed to draw generalizations regarding stakeholders' perceptions that were then considered in light of conclusions drawn from observations and field notes (Creswell, 2012). Through *content analyses*, the researchers derived a sense of the elements of education that characterize NTICs and other schools founded on principles found in the philosophy of education supported by the educational entrepreneurs. The researchers examined the narrative data to derive themes from interviews and looked for new themes or propositions expressed by the respondents. After that, the researchers employed the strategy of *peer review* (Johnson, 1997), where the doctoral advisor independently read and analyzed the interview transcripts, checking for evidence of the themes and assertions, and verifying them with the original data. This process led to clarification, and in some cases, reorganization of the narrative (DeSa, 2009).

Findings

After analyzing participants' perceptions, the data pointed to a theme related to the involvement

of NTICs in *the building of a modern nation*. This theme is divided into three subthemes based on the critical relationships that exist between education and tolerance of diversity, education and the end of violence, and education and patriotic concern for the betterment of the creation of a modern Nigerian nation.

The country of Nigeria, most involved in the study reported, is faced with many problems. Addressing these problems is understood by some participants to be a critical goal of the private education system that exists in Nigeria. Amongst the most critical problems is the shocking lack of education amongst the people, which leads to high rates of illiteracy (Dike, 2008). Participants also believe that lack of education is a major cause of the conflict and war that is so prevalent in the nation's history: because people are ignorant of the plight of others and unable or unwilling to deal with difference in a civil society.

Theme One: Education and Tolerance for Diversity

The hope for a better future may reside in the private schools, such as NTICs that exist in the country. These schools are promoting changes in the way Nigerian's are educated, serving as models for change in the public school system and providing the means to educate a generation that is literate and capable of building a better Nigeria. The NTICs are thought by many to be at the forefront of the movement to build an educational system that helps students grow academically while developing character traits and moral understandings that go beyond religion to instill values that are essential for a civil society (Aydin & Chandler, 2010; Nelson, 2005). Those who were interviewed argued that the NTICs are addressing issues of intolerance and violence by teaching students how to be respectful of self and others and how to live honest lives. This character education is supported by the diversity experienced in the schools. The students reported living peacefully with students from different socio-economic, religious, ethnic, and geographical backgrounds. They reported being given the opportunity, in their everyday lives and in their daily routines, to put into action the lessons aimed at living peacefully with people who are different from themselves.

People who have not had experiences with those who are different from themselves are unable to live harmoniously in settings punctuated by a diversity of people. One student reported that stereotypes and lack of education have led to much violence and fear within the country. Another male student reported:

But through character education students are learning how to live peacefully with others. Through living with students of different religions, ethnicities, and socio-economic status, students are learning the lesson. They live, play, and learn with people who are different from themselves and carry what they learned into the social situations in which they find themselves (January 23, 2010).

Amidst the challenges of living in a country fraught with tension played out in deadly clashes between members of different religious sects, parents reported that the NTICs succeed in bringing students to see one another as fellow human beings of equal value despite differences in faith. The parents appear to agree that it is beneficial to ignore the differences so that common ground can be discovered on which all can live in relative harmony. As the General Director said:

My schools help out the people from different backgrounds to understand each other. Then in the

boarding schools I am running, people live together, have showers together, and eat together, and study together in the same class ... and this helps the Nigerian generation in the future (January 20, 2010).

The Director went on to explain that having a residential program where the children live on campus allows them to get to know each other through proximity. He is confident that by learning to embrace diversity in their schools, they are better equipped to be the future leaders of the country. Testimony from a graduate of a NTIC in one of the student focus groups mirrors the thoughts of the administrator:

Here you get to meet a lot of people from the different parts of the country, so when you go to university you are exposed to different kinds of people. So if you already have an idea of how to relate with them ... you don't have a lot of problems, you can enjoy the diversity (January 23, 2010).

Another NTIC administrator, a Nigerian national, told the researchers:

Our schools in Nigeria are very diverse because we have students from 191 different tribes, and we have students from Ghana, Turkey, India, Pakistan, and other African countries. So these students from different backgrounds learn how live together, respect each other. I think this is a very unique issue for Nigerian society as well as for [the] global world (January 22, 2010).

A current 12th grade student's comment echoed what the Nigerian administrator said:

They don't teach you how ... to be a Christian, like in my former school, but rather how to tolerate other religions. It is a mixture of Christians, Muslims and other religions. They teach you how to accept other people with their religions because in this school there are a lot of internationals and maybe their behaviors might be different but you can see that we are all together in this school. They show us how to cope with one another (January 26, 2010).

The students learn about diversity through both the diverse nature of the school population and the residential system, and also through travel. As noted above, the school arranges trips for students to encounter life outside Nigeria in places such as Ghana, North Africa and Turkey. This travel is believed to help them learn how to relate to other people who live in different geographical locations. From what the NTIC students told the researchers, it appears that they do learn to accept each other as human beings and do have mutual respect for one another. In regard to socio-economic background, a Nigerian administrator said:

We have the students from very wealthy families—the richest families in the country and the poorest families in the country—and they live in dormitories, they live together, eat together, share the same classroom, and receive the same education. And the most important thing is that they understand each other (January 26, 2010).

The diversity experience doesn't end with students learning how to live and work with others of different ethnicities and religions, but also teaches them how to live and work with others of different socio-economic status. As one student highlighted, "It's actually a mixed school ... where you can relate no matter where you are from, who you are, who you believe in, whatsoever." An 11th grade female student, when asked if the school changed the way she

understood others, said:

Yes, because when I was here I didn't really pay attention to anybody's tribe or religion, you know, I just got along with most of the students. And we used to go for picnics and discussions and all that, there was always a mix of people so I didn't really notice that difference (January 24, 2010).

Students talked about how the diverse living experience works to accomplish the goals that are set forth by the administration. They reported that they have learned not to take into consideration such things as tribe and religion when socializing with others at their school events and this was truly evident in the interaction the researchers observed in classrooms, hallways, during assemblies, on field trips, and on the sports courts. This indicates that the attitudes that the teachers and the administration are attempting to inculcate in students are being internalized. Another Turkish administrator said, "there are a lot of good students from the poor families who cannot send their kids here. So this [is] one shortcoming." In order to accomplish the goal of diversifying the student population, students of low socioeconomic status are provided with scholarships to attend the school. A Turkish administrator said:

We are not only [the only ones] supporting poor and outstanding students. Some states' governors also support four or five poor students every year. Additionally, one of the Turkish businessmen who does business in Nigeria is also supporting twenty students each year too. Therefore, in total we have 400 students with scholarship out of 1,600 students in our schools. Our students [are] from very poor famil[ies] and very wealthy famil[ies] but they live together, eat the same food, share the same class, and learn the same stuff (January 21, 2010).

A Nigerian male teacher reported,

The uniqueness of our school is being a diverse, multicultural school. Our students and teachers are from Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo and other tribes, [they are] Indian, Turkish and Pakistani and so on. Also our staff are Christians, Muslim, and of indigenous religions.

Although academic results are important, and a major tenant of Gülen education, a very important part of this educational system is the diversity that exists among teachers and students in each school and the understandings such proximity develops.

Theme Two: Education and the End of Violence

Informants claimed with regularity that it is mainly the illiterate who are eager to use violence. Several interviewees said much the same thing as this student, from a focus group, who told the researchers that:

The problem in Nigeria is a high illiteracy. People in Nigeria are divided into three different education systems, which don't work at all. In Muslim schools they teach about the Muslim religion, in Christian schools they teach Christianity, and the indigenous schools teach their own tribal beliefs. These segregated schools do not emphasize math or English. They just teach basic things and religious study. Through the schools' segregation, students do not learn about other ethnic and religious backgrounds. So, these cause more problems. Our main problems in the country are ignorance and clashes between different ethnic and religious groups (January 26, 2010).

It is clear from the statements collected that many teachers and administrators also appear to think that, while public schools have their share of problems, the religious private schools do not help to address the problems that divide the country, often emphasizing differences rather than teaching for mutual understanding between religions and ethnic groups.

If concepts such as love, peace, tolerance, and ethics are not introduced through education, according to the participants, Nigeria will have a tragic future. A student at the NTICs warned the researchers about this, saying:

Lot[s] of countries run terrorist organizations and spend a lot of money on war. For example, some countries make nuclear bombs. And I believe that America is not happy to be in Iraq or Afghanistan. That might be the government position but I believe the American people are not happy with that because they spend billions and billions of money. But I also understand them because they worry about Iraq and Afghanistan becoming big problems so they try to solve the problems but in a wrong way. Right now Iran is building chemical bombs and tomorrow we don't know what to expect Iran is going to do (January 26, 2010).

Countries all over the world experience problems with war and violence and significant money is spent on war in the oil rich Islamic countries. Consequently, the Nigerian students are afraid the connection between religion, oil and war will influence the future of Nigeria. What is happening in these other countries is likely to happen in Nigeria too since it is religious leaders in these countries who have an impact on political decisions, and by teaching divisiveness rather than solidarity they have an impact on the religious schools. This could push the balance of education in a negative direction. Unfortunately, as one student pointed out:

There are a lot of ignorant *imams* [preachers] interpreting holy books, like the Qu'ran. Imagine that? If you [are] really an illiterate person and even cannot speak English, [imagine] picking up a book like the Qu'ran [and] read[ing] to people. So, this is one of the big issues [problems] in our country. Illiterate people trying to educate [others]; how could it be? There are a lot of teachers or imams around the country who even cannot speak English or know nothing about religions but they teach. Unfortunately, many people obey them whatever they say, so this brings problems between ethnic and religious groups (January 27, 2010).

As another student argued, "It is only education that will help them to learn the right information and tell people the truth." This point of view was shared by one of the parents:

Well, for some people who are not educated ... but for the people who are well educated... like I can say I'm well educated... I'm a Muslim, she is a Christian ... there is tolerance and then ... there is mutual-understanding between her and me. So, NTIC is a unique example having students from all of the states, also from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. Therefore, if we have a lot of schools such as NTICs that will minimize problems in our country (January 27, 2010).

Moreover, a student who understood both Gülen's principles and the Qu'ran stated that:

Gülen says all these problems can only be solved by education. For example, people who say because of my religion I am going to light bombs and explode the people in mosque[s] or churches, in religion there is no where they tell people to go and kill people. In the Muslim religion there is nothing in the verses (Hadith) from the holy book that says go and kill people, or explode people, or explode yourself—put the bombs on your body and kill people. There is no way in religion. If they do such

stupid things it is because of ignorance and lack of education. So, because of lack of education these people from terrorist organizations they kill themselves or kill other people (January 27, 2010).

With education people can learn about their religion and about the religions of others and, with this information, they can learn to be tolerant and learn to avoid mistakes such as killing people out of ignorance. Consequently, teachers have a very crucial role to play, and fortunately, they are aware of this.

Theme Three: Education and Love of Country

The last theme is related to the issue of the educated leaving the country, something that the schools try to deal with by promoting love of country. As one student told the researchers, there is a need in Nigeria for educated people in many fields:

In Nigeria, we have a lot of problems, such as petroleum, health problems, educational needs, political corruption, and lack of technologies. Awareness of the problems of Nigeria leads NTICs to focus on both science and social science to educate future leaders to solve these concerns. Our teachers always encourage us to choose such jobs related to Nigerian problems, such as medical doctors, teachers, engineers, and politicians. Also, they ... always keep saying that wherever you go to college, you have to come back [to] your country and find [a] job and work here. (January 27, 2010)

Thus, students are aware that, beyond the mere needs for education, literacy, and ways to address violence and disease, there is a need for trained human power. There is the need for people in the country to become educated and serve Nigeria. The assumption in the NTICs is that the students who are taking classes today are growing up to be the future leaders of Nigeria. Through the education they receive, students are learning to lead the country in a peaceful, tolerant, educated manner as they move into the future.

However, this goal will not be achieved if the educated people do not stay in Nigeria. This need is clearly on the minds of parents, one of whom said that,

there is need for Nigerians to be united, that there is need for them to be entrepreneurs—that there is need for them to work here in Nigeria, and not to go and work in London and UK and forget their parents.

The parents want the schools to encourage their children to stay in Nigeria and to not forget their origins. Their children are aware of this situation, and, as one student from a focus group reported, the schools have even developed a strategy to motivate them to come back:

The idea that we learn from our school is to be patriotic. Our Vice Principal (VP) who is also a general consultant for character education classes always reminds us [to] go to colleges abroad and come back. He said even if you go to China, or Yale University [in] the United States, Turkey and EU countries, you have to come back and find a job [and] work here for [your] nation. Through his motivation and encouragement and our countries problems, we have to come back to solve our concerns. (January 28, 2010)

This indicates that the goals expressed by the teachers, administrators, and parents—of keeping the educated people in Nigeria—are being heard by the students.

It is true, that because of their academic abilities, many of the students do go abroad for further education, but, as a Turkish administrator points out, they know they are needed in their own country:

Most of our students should be go overseas to receive a good education but whenever they complete their education they are coming back because, here, there are a lot of job opportunities and they know their country needs them as they have learned from character education classes. (January 21, 2010)

Students, from a young age, are taught that their country needs them and, therefore, that they should return with their education to better their own nation. Consequently, most of the students interviewed said they really have some kind of dedication to help their country. According to one NTIC teacher:

Besides being a teacher, I am also a counselor at all 17 NTICs in Nigeria. I do keep track of students who have already graduated from our schools. Approximately, 54% of our students go to England, Turkey, the USA, Malaysia, and Canada etc. to complete their education. And most of them get scholarships because of high GPA and [having] passed international tests. Sometimes, I go to these countries and visit them once a year. I am very happy that almost 82.1% of our students are coming back and finding a job here. (February 2, 2010)

The numbers cited here indicate that a high percentage of students do return to Nigeria after they get their post-secondary education. This could be an indication of the success of the character education programs, which teach the importance of returning to Nigeria and the schools. Table 4 shows the number of students who return to Nigeria after receiving their education from another country.

As one can see from Table 4, 280 students graduated from NTICs at Abuja campus from 2004 to 2006. Of these, 129 students (46%) enrolled in Nigerian universities and 151 students (54%) went to many different countries with scholarships to receive their education. Of the students who went to other countries, 82.1% have returned to work in Nigeria. Figure 1 shows the number of students admitted to Nigerian universities and the number of students who were admitted to overseas universities.

One graduate student had this to say to the researchers:

I received my BA at the University of Leeds in UK. And now, I am planning to go back to London to do my Master's degree, but after that I might work there for a bit, maybe a couple of years to get some experience, but then, I will come back here. Here, in Nigeria, there are a lot of job positions for me (February 04, 2010).

Another graduate student expressed such internalized values of students returning to their country to help and work for Nigeria. He explained that students receive a quality education at the distinguished universities in the world and they also work in a host country to get some experience and then they plan on using their experience when they return to the country. As a Nigerian male teacher and NTIC graduate, proud of the schools' achievement, he reported:

As you know Nigerian education is not working well because of a lot of reasons. So, we encourage our students to become teachers, although the teachers get low salaries. Thirty-five of our graduates from last year who went to different educational programs at the outstanding universities ... abroad ...

Table 4

Frequency Distribution of Graduated Students who return to Nigeria after completing their Degree Overseas

Academic Year	Total Number of Students Graduated	Total Number of Students who went Overseas	Total Number of Students who return to Nigeria	Percent
2004	58	39	32	82
2005	108	60	48	80
2006	114	53	44	83
Total	280	151	124	82.1

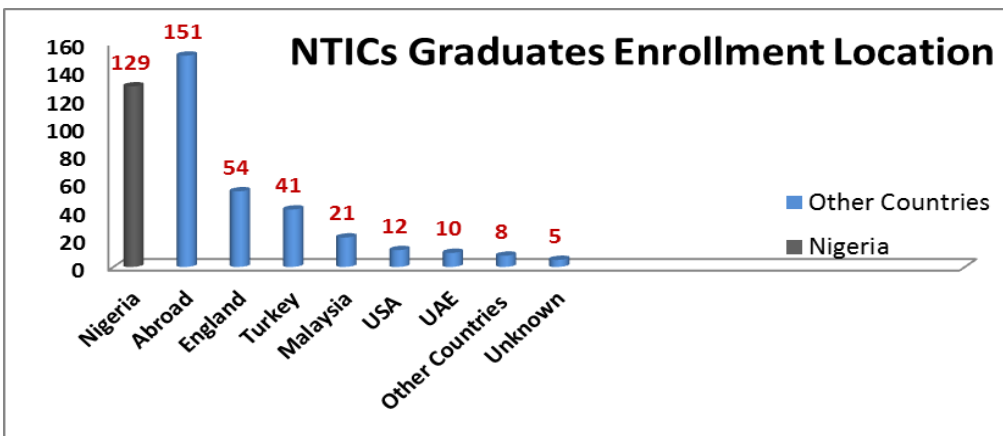


Figure 1. Frequency Distribution of NTICs' Graduate Students' Number and Enrollment Location
 Source: Nigerian-Turkish International Colleges (NTICs) Handbook (2009).

[became teachers]. We are so proud of them because this is a kind of altruistic aspect to be a teacher and help their people. (February 3, 2010).

This idea of returning to help one's country after furthering one's education is proof of love of one's country, patriotism. It is an indication of being altruistic and wanting to give back to your country. The students are taught to be self-sacrificing for the good of others, and these lessons are being lived out in the lives of many students who want to help their own people. Gülen (2004) defines love as an elixir; a human lives with love, is made happy by love and makes those around him or her happy with love for others and for all of humankind. During the interviews, the word "love" was repeated 136 times by participants and it was clear that participants who associate with NTICs consciously make an effort to engage in the rhetoric of love to encourage students to love one another. A Nigerian male teacher said that Gülen always defines humanism as a doctrine of love and humanity and that humanistic message is consistently made clear to the students. One student confirmed the teacher's point, stating that:

People in this school teach us to LOVE our country. The idea of love goes beyond that of simply loving one another. Not only should one love others and share with others, but each individual should love the country of Nigeria. Through the love of the country, each individual will work to help the country and, therefore, will help to make the country better. The school is teaching its students to love their

country. (January 25, 2010)

This focus on love was also highlighted by one of the NTIC administrators, who said that:

The idea that we have gotten from school is that we have to know that we are all one family. We are all one family and we need to share ideas and we need to share love. We need to share whatever we have with one another. We need not be selfish with our ideas. (January 27, 2010)

In other words, that means that *the one* to be considered as a family member is everyone in Nigeria, Turkey, even the world. The school, through Gülen's educational paradigm, is sending the message that people must all love each other. There must be an awareness of others and a love for them. To show our love we should share our ideas.

As one can see, these three stakeholders, who are directly involved in the educational enterprise of NTICs, agree on the importance of the concept of love in the school programs. Another Nigerian male teacher points out that Gülen's philosophy is applied, in the name of love, to the "brain drain" problem Nigeria faces where its intellectuals, too many of them, are leaving the country to reside elsewhere.

Love of your country! Fethullah Gülen emphasizes "love" many times in his books. I think he means, by "love your country" for one to be patriotic. So, if we are [citizens], then we can do something for our nation. Actually, from the first year (J-1) to the last year (S-3) of graduation, we are trying to enlighten students about their country, to love their nation. Therefore, throughout Gülen's writings, he encourages his volunteers to teach students about loving one another as a human being and loving their country. Then they will help their country's development, being arbiters in the future. (January 26, 2010)

To counter the exodus, the students are being taught, throughout their education, about their country and about patriotic values. The hope is that the students will want to help their country and will choose to stay in the country and those who go to another country to receive their education, once finished, will return to Nigeria.

In addition to infusing these patriotic values, based upon Gülen's notions of love, the school also emphasizes the related principles of peace and mutual understanding. A Turkish female teacher, in describing her observations of students, said, "Actually I saw peace and love in the students' eyes, to their teachers and, between, and among them. I saw peace." She said this while explaining why she chose to teach at a school that embraced elements of the Gülen philosophy. Upon visiting the school she saw students acting in ways that demonstrated both love and peace. She felt that she could sense that love in the interactions occurring between the students and the teachers.

In analyzing the data by graduates' areas of study, it appears that students pick areas of study important to solving the important problems Nigeria faces. The areas in which there is the greatest need are engineering, medicine, education, and business. From the participants' view, they are taught through character education, to focus on these fields, which will help to focus on Nigerian problems. In addition to that, one Nigerian female teacher told the researchers:

I have been saying this, that we are the young generation and we are the leaders of tomorrow. It is just a saying but I think it goes a long way. As you lay your bed so you lie on it. Students always expect an encouragement and motivation from their teachers. So, we should tell them what to do at time by

time. They are all well aware of these suggestions from us. (January 28, 2010)

The students are well aware of the lessons from their teachers. As one of them said, referring to his experience, they are being taught to highly regard the altruistic goal of returning to the country after receiving an education:

It is a good thing that the Turkish schools are here. Because there are several of them around the country now, and I think there are plans for more. So given the whole picture, the Turkish schools provide the positive energy in Nigeria. Just from my experience because I was in London for 5 years I could stay there after completing my degree but I am here. So this is a proof, right? (January 28, 2010)

This returning student also discussed his choice to return to help with the schools, aware in his opinion that the schools are good for the country and he wanted to be a part of the change. That will be his contribution towards the building of modern Nigeria.

In addition, several participants like those quoted below, point to the awakening of the spirit that is essential to the evolution of societies toward democratic institutions (Lafer, 2014).

“We are leaders of tomorrow,” one student in a focus group reported and “We will solve all of our country’s problems [and] make our county [a] better place to live,” (January 26, 2010) another one added.

A parent said of the people working at the schools, “You see, they are really trying to make the children there love themselves [and] believe that they are equal. No matter your religion, no matter your class, everybody is equal NTIC, it’s actually a mixed school.”

Another parent commented as follows: “It’s a school where you can relate no matter where you are from, who you are, what you or who you believe in, whatsoever.”

Participants also happily pointed out that the children of the presidents of Nigeria have attended and are currently attending NTICs in Abuja. Their children are interacting with

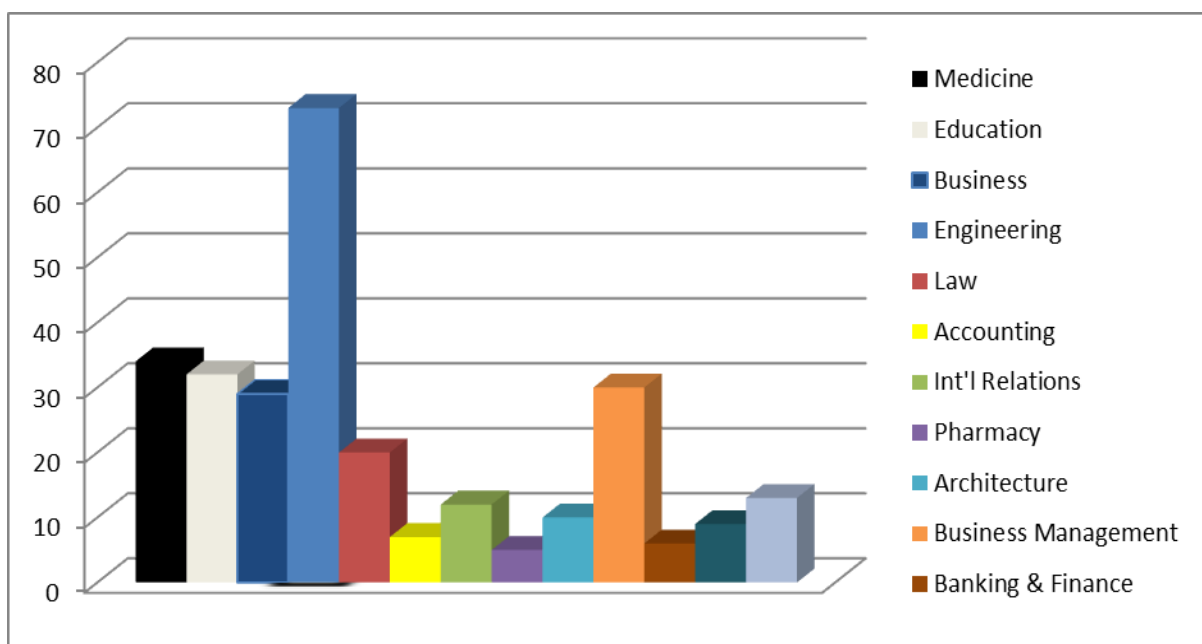


Figure 2. Frequency Distribution of NTICs' Graduates According to their Study Areas

Source: Nigerian-Turkish International Colleges (NTICs) Handbook (2009).

children who come from the ranks of the poor. Thus, participants say, the elite mixes with the poor and understandings are developed which are carried back to homes and into government offices.

There is reason to believe that most NTIC graduates will return to work in Nigeria and are aware of the fact that the schools are good for the country and that education is a critical component for the nation's modernization. NTIC students expressed the desire to contribute to the building of the modern Nigeria.

Discussion and Conclusion

Participants shared a variety of information and experiences related to NTICs in Abuja, Nigeria. Through the use of triangulation of data analysis, a major theme emerged from the study that was the building of a modern nation with three sub-themes through improved education in the country. The education sector in Nigeria, unfortunately, is faced with many problems including poor funding, inadequate technology, a paucity of quality teachers and classroom and school environments that would tax even the most capable of educators (Odia & Omofonmwan, 2007). In addition, UNESCO (2008) reported that there has been a noticeable improvement of educational facilities in Nigeria in the recent years. The illiteracy rate for adults, however, according to the World Bank (2009), has dropped from 38% in 2008 to 35.9% in 2009. Still, the Federal Minister of Education (2008) acknowledged Nigeria has the lowest literacy rate in sub-Saharan Africa. It is believed that the high illiteracy rate in Nigeria is, in part, caused by religious, ethnic, and tribal differences that cause strife that has led to thousands of Nigerians being killed in conflicts between Muslims and Christians (Aslandogan, 2006; Aydin & Lafer, 2012). Those involved in the study consistently stressed the fact that Gülen attaches considerable importance to education. He describes education as the key solution to common problems that cut across developing countries (Gülen, 1997). For Gülen, establishing order and harmony in one's personal and social life, and even preparing for a better life beyond the grave, will only be possible through education (Turgut, 1998) and such education is essential to peace and harmony. In Nigerian Gülen-inspired schools, Muslim and Christian students and teachers work and study side by side, building a culture of dialogue that participants greatly prize. Several scholars studied Gülen-inspired schools in different countries. For example, in the Philippines, a study conducted by Michel (cited in Nelson, 2005) found out that at the Philippine-Turkish School of Tolerance, in a city where half of the population is Christian and the other half is Muslim, students live and study side by side and in the process build a culture of dialogue and respect.

The Philippine-Turkish School provides more than a thousand students more positive ways to interact than the violent example set by military and paramilitary forces. The school lives up to its name, providing a bastion of tolerance in an otherwise religiously polarized area of the Philippines. Michel (2003) describes the school as having excellent relations with Christian institutions in the region. In addition, Agai (2003) stated that Gülen-inspired schools do not teach only science, but also they communicate universal values of honesty, hard work, harmony and conscientious service. Furthermore, Celik (2011) found out that Gülen-inspired schools in Europe bring multiculturalism to classrooms and students from different ethnicities study side by side to build a harmony of democracy, and raise future leaders for European Countries.

Another study by Kalyoncu (2008) in Kenya and Uganda found out that the ethno-religious diversity of the student body in the Gülen-inspired schools reflected the general characteristics

of the country where located. He also underlined that the Gülen-inspired schools provided scholarships to students who come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds in both Kenya and Uganda. For example, one administrator said,

There are a lot of good students from the poor families which cannot send their kids here. So this [is] one shortcoming, we also have to accept good students from poor families, right now we have 160 students on free tuition.

In order to accomplish the goal of socioeconomically diversifying the student population, students of low socio-economic status are provided with scholarships to be able to attend the school.

Another finding from this study indicated that the belief is strong among participants that education received in the NTICs will help graduates lead the country in a peaceful, tolerant, and informed manner as it moves into the future. This goal, of course, will only be achieved if educated people stay in Nigeria. Therefore, the goal of preventing a *brain drain* is a major concern and the usefulness of the NTICs in the development of a strong educated class dedicated to that future was noted on many occasions during the researchers' visit to Abuja.

In addition, the NTICs, participants reported, address issues of intolerance and violence by teaching students how to be respectful of themselves and others and how to live honest lives. This character education is supported by the diversity experienced in the schools. In addition to direct teaching of character education, NTICs integrate academics with extracurricular activities focusing on global social skills and ethical values like integrity, sincerity, respect for elders, the need to be humble, to not tell lies, to avoid drinking alcohol and smoking, and to be humane, and so on. Ebaugh (2010) points out that Gülen repeatedly stresses the importance of teaching students sound ethical and moral values—and measures success in terms of both scientific and moral progress. Students explained that every week in the NTICs, organized seminars take place for discussion of moral values such as how to be a good person, how to make one's life better in the future, and how to respect elders and people from different backgrounds. They emphasized that they learn how to live together as human beings. As one student put it, the seminars "[motivate students] to choose our future careers and learn how to help our country." The classes seemed to be popular with the students, most of whom spoke of them with affection.

Moreover, most participants shared stories related to the educational problems in Nigeria. They generally had positive feelings about the way that NTICs are addressing these problems. Informants claimed with regularity that it is mainly the illiterate and ignorant who are eager to use violence. Participants reported that ignorance is Nigeria's major problem. Lack of education, they reported, fuels these conflicts. The NTICs, participants explained, promote peace, dialogue, and mutual understanding and contribute to a peaceful coexistence for adherents of different faiths, cultures, ethnicities and races. Gülen (1997) says that ignorance is a serious problem and it is an enemy of all human beings and it is only eliminated through education.

What the NTICs do best, to engender hope that graduates will, at some point in their lives, contribute to peace, harmony, and the elimination of the societal realities that cause discord and violence, is neither curriculum nor teaching methods, necessarily. It is the way in which students are engaged in life on campus that brings people of different backgrounds together for the common purpose of becoming educated. Beyond Gülen philosophy, it is the interaction between people that promotes the understandings that come to override preconceived notions that lead to hatred and strife.

At the same time it must be noted that, despite harmony on campus, education in NTICs tends to ignore, quite purposefully it seems, the very causes of the discontent that undermine attempts at bringing about national unity. In Nigeria, despite the massive wealth generated by the exploitation of the oil resource, only a few benefit because ruling elites control the operation of government and use government to benefit themselves at the expense of the masses. NTICs are cautious in regard to how they deal with those in power in the country, this is necessary, perhaps, if NTICs are to continue operations in Nigeria. However, such caution and the desire to remain politically neutral probably prevents students from developing a realistic notion of what it is that troubles their nation and, because of this, may undermine the ability of graduates to bring about the kind of substantial change needed to put Nigeria on the course to authentic democracy and the creation of institutions that are truly by, for, and of the people.

Furthermore, keeping the educated people in Nigeria is also one of the most essential goals of the NTICs, hence the necessity for discussing the issue of *brain drain* mentioned earlier. The participants were aware that the educated people have to stay in the country in order to promote a better future for Nigeria and that the conditions in Nigeria often lead to flight from the country for those who are educated. They reported that many Nigerian students go abroad for their education but they do not come back to their country because of the condition of life in Nigeria. Two hundred and eighty students graduated from NTICs from 2004 to 2006. Of these, 128 enrolled in Nigerian universities, and 152 students studied abroad in many different countries, almost always with scholarships. The Vice Counselor of NTICs reported that out of the students who went to other countries, 82.1% of them had returned to Nigeria for some period of time and found jobs considered to be in the interest of the development of the country. The teachers report that they are proud of this record because this idea of returning to help one's country after furthering one's education is understood to be a part of good character. It may be an indication of altruism and the desire to give back to one's country.

Many participants attributed such an outcome to the fact that students are taught to give of themselves for the good of others, and these lessons are being lived out in the lives of many students who want to help their own people. Speculative as this may be, the researchers sincerely hope for it to be true, as the Nigerian nation needs people so motivated. On the other hand, it is understandable that people who experience a better kind of existence in places beyond Nigerian borders would want to remain where the opportunities for such a life exist. Altruism and self-sacrifice are powerful in that they require an incredible amount of dedication, resolve, and, probably, a high degree of hope that one's contribution can make a difference. Whether students who graduate from the NTICs will remain in Nigeria to share the benefits with their countrymen and countrywomen is something that should be monitored.

The study finds that Gülenian education, as it is being implemented in Nigeria, according to the reflections of those involved with the institutions, does work to expose students to people of different geographical areas of Nigeria, people who often are of different ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds. School organization and activities allow students to experience those different from themselves in a safe setting resulting in their learning to appreciate one another. Finally, there is reason to believe that most NTIC graduates will return to work in Nigeria and are aware of the fact that the schools are good for the country and that education is a critical component for the nation's modernization. NTIC students expressed the desire to contribute to the building of the modern Nigeria.

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Note

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