SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION: A TOOL FOR PROMOTING INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

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Abstract
The aim of intercultural education is the promotion of culture of tolerance, respect for human rights and justice among diverse ethnic and linguistic groups that exist in most modern states. Since there is hardly any ‘ethnically pure’ human society, intercultural educators argue that diversity in culture and language need not pose much obstacle to nation building where conscious efforts are made to develop appropriate knowledge, skills, values and competencies critical to effective citizenship. The Nigerian experience of ethnic and communal clashes suggests that the country may need to review its school curricula with purpose of infusing intercultural elements and strategies into relevant programmes and activities to enhance its citizenship development processes. Against the backdrop of theoretical perspectives to nation building, intercultural education and effective citizenship, this paper discusses the relevance of social studies programme in undertaking such curricular review as well as highlights the likely issues, problems and prospects in achieving this desirable goal.

Nigeria is yet far from being a united, free and democratic society as envisaged in the second National Development Plan (1970-1974), neither have its citizens fully embraced the principles and ethos of effective citizenship required for achieving the country’s dream of nationhood. A clear indication of this is the number of intra-ethnic, inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts in the Nigerian state has had to contend with in its 45 years of existence as an independent ‘nation’. Rather than abating, “there has been a dramatic surge in xenophobic expressions, the hardening of ethno-regional positions and the proliferation of ethnic militias that have unleashed varying degrees of violence” (Egwu 2001:1). In the same vein, there is a rising wave of religious fundamentalism, millenarian religious movements of all kinds and an extreme of religious intolerance resulting into numerous cases of intra-and inter-religious violence. (Egwu 2001:1). Oftentimes, it becomes really difficult to draw a clear line of demarcation between inter-religious and interethnic conflict and vice-versa especially when such crises involve the North-south divide of the country. For example, Okoye (2000) reports that the Bantusanization policy in Northern Nigerian was associated with ethnic and religious cleansing of communities, groups and individuals and this led to the death of over 15,000 persons between 1990 and 1999. Hence suggesting a cultural (including political) approach to the analysis and resolution of the flashpoints in Nigeria’s quest for nationhood.

Nigeria, like other states of Africa, sought for measures to forge unity among its diverse ethnic, linguistic and religious groups estimated at over 300. (Awa, 1983) especially within the framework of formal education. This is amply illustrated in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 1988). Right from the pre-primary education level,
the Nigeria school child is expected to learn the social norms of the society and develop a sense of co-operation and team-sprit. At the primary level, the child is to be given “citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in contribution to the life of the society” (FRN 1988:13).

The policy documents further stresses that for the secondary education the specific goals for the Nigerian child shall, among others, include developing and promoting Nigerian languages and culture in the context of world’s cultural heritage; fostering National unity with emphasis on the common ties that unite us in our diversity; and raising “a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labour, appreciate those values specified under our broad national goals and live as good citizens” (FRN, 1988:17). Other strategies and policies envisaged for complementing these curricular-based ones are inter-state visit and school excursions by students; the establishment of ‘unity schools’ at the secondary level in most states of the federation; the orientation of federal tertiary institutions as instruments for cementing national unity and creation of national consciousness e.g. through inter-ethnic hostel accommodation, quota admission policy and the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme (Nwabachili, 2000).

The variable extents to which these and other strategies for advancing the country on the nation-building project are yet to be fully assessed. However, what cannot be disputed is that much remains to be done in realizing the Nigerian project. If anything, in place of ethno-religious crises that is seemingly becoming a permanent index of the Nigeria nation-state clearly attests to widespread predisposition to violence which itself signposts attitude of intolerance, disrespect for the rights of other individuals and groups denial of justice and fair-play and similar ways of life which are antithetical to effective citizenship and nation building. The primary goal of this paper therefore is to examine how the idea of intercultural education within the framework of integrated Social Studies could further galvanize the production of a new generation of citizens who can work assiduously for the realization of the Nigerian dream.

### Nation Building, Intercultural Education and Effective Citizenship: Some Theoretical Considerations

Concepts like ‘nation building’, ‘nation integration’, and ‘national unity’ seem to be used interchangeably in literature to connote conscious efforts on the part of otherwise diverse people to play down what divide them while promoting what they have in common (Awa, 1983: Ayida 1990: Nwabachili, 2000: Egwu, 2001). Following Awa’s (1983) typology, however, three broad perspectives or approaches to the study of the nation building process can be distilled. These are the structural, cultural and Marxian approaches. The structural approach suggests that a country is said to be integrated only, when none of its constituent parts can break away without affecting others. Here, the unity is viewed in both vertical and horizontally related people and group such as interaction between guilds, religious groups, and ethnic nationalities and communities (Awa, 1983). The structural approach seems popular with analyst of the ‘national question’ in Nigeria in recent years (e.g. Egwu, 2001, Akinyanju, 2001).
The cultural perspective to nation-building stresses the point that a society is integrated to the extent to which people develop common cultural patterns, norms and values and abide by them (Awa, 1983). In other words, this approach to nation building tends to de-emphasize cultural differences. It rather encourages cultural assimilation in order to forge ‘national consensuses and the achievement of common language, religious, etc for the purpose of accelerated nation building through effective (political) communication. The immediate danger here is the threat to minority groups whose ways of life may be swept to the background if not out rightly annihilated.

The Marxian approach emphasizes the primary of wealth distribution in manner that is fair, just and equitable. Simply put, the argument that poverty knows no geographical boundary; as the poor in all parts of the country share the same burden-want, misery, underdevelopment, etc. If the existential needs of the people could be addressed, contended this school of thought, the propensity to relapse to ethnic and religious cleavages to eke out a living will be minimized if not eliminated. To the Marxian theorists, therefore, the problem of national integration, especially those of ethnicity, regionalism, religion, etc. are false problems or intellectual diversions by bourgeois scholars and manipulations of the political system (Awa, 1983). The popularity of this perspective, however, seems to have dwindled with the collapse of the totalitarian regimes of Eastern Europe and the subsequent proliferation of nation-states within that part of the planet: thus suggesting that meeting the material needs alone may not be a sufficient substitute for addressing people’s diversity in culture, language, religion, etc. For example, Hamot (1999:163) reports that the “transition from Sovietization to democratization has been problematic, and long-term solutions these problems are still being formulated and tested.

In the post-cold war era, Galtung (2003) advises that what nation-states require for promoting peace and achieving nation building is tapping the best in all approaches. This is what Kymlicka (2001) in Mustapha (2003) terms ‘a complex package of robust forms of nation-building combined and constrained by robust forms of minority rights’. The point is that all peoples are multicultural in composition; there ishardtly a ‘culturally pure’ human society and it is in this context that intercultural education is being promoted globally as a strategy to imbue individuals with knowledge, skills, values and competencies needed to understand, appreciate and respect what other individuals and groups have to contribute to the building of a just, free, united and democratic society. Lasonen. (2003:10).

The concept of intercultural education covers a way of thinking, a philosophical perspective, a set of decision-making criteria and a value orientation. Its aim is to give people frames of reference for acting in intercultural situations and for meeting and serving diverse citizens and fellow workers. The conceptual explication of multicultural education reflects a multidisciplinary, anthropological, psychological, sociological and educational-approach. Intercultural education involves questions linked with and reflections on conceptions of the human being and knowledge, curricula, teaching, learning, administration, and learning environments.
Academic Excellence

As ideal intercultural education programme should serve the purpose of the United Nations education. The United Nations defines the “culture of Peace” as a set of values, attitudes, modes of behavior and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations (UN Resolution A/RES/13). For achieving its objectives in promoting the culture of peace, the UNESCO advocates curricular review geared to promote sustainable economic and social development, promote respect for all human rights; ensure equality between women and men; foster democratic participation; advance understanding, tolerance and solidarity; support participatory communication and the free flow of information knowledge; and promote international peace and security.

Ultimately, intercultural education within the context of nation-states should serve as an instrument for social re-engineering for effective citizenship (Mustapha, 2003). It should among others, re-orientate the citizenry against what Galtung (2003) perceptively characterize as the CGT syndrome

C – Choosiness, by God or other transcendental forces;
G – Glory, a vision of past and/or future glory for the chosen ones); and
T – Trauma, that the present is filled with suffering for instance, at the hand of others, who cannot stand having been chosen as Satan’s instruments, like Christians versus the unbelievers; the Moslems versus the infidels’ etc.

Where CGT is deep-rooted in a multicultural setting like Nigeria, citizens will be indisposed to respecting the rights and values of other citizens and groups since those who are not chosen by God cannot have equal claim with the chosen ones. Galtung’s (2003) explanation of the four stages of intercultural relations- intolerance, tolerance or passive multiculturalism; dialogue or active multiculturalism and transculturalism provide a deeper insight into what may be expected of the new generation of the citizen within an intercultural education framework. The intolerance stage includes direct violence, hurting/harming, even exterminating with culture as the criterion often engaged in by people on CGT; or be based on the typical nation-state structural violence of dominant/majority over minority cultures. In the second stage, other culture are given (at least close to) equal right. However, there is little contact, dialogue and mutual learning.

These would only come in the third stage, based on curiosity. Lastly, with the person, fourth stage is most interesting. Gultung calls it “transculturalism”, which has the same relation to multi-and intercultural as transdisciplinarity has to multi-and interdisciplinarity. What emerges is a new cultural reality, as Polynesian and western cultures not only mix but blend inside the minds of so many people in the Hawaiian archipelago.
The Place of Nigeria Social Studies

The introduction of Social Studies in Nigeria schools was part of the independence efforts at reengineering the inherited colonial educational packages and processes which least served the interest of the country. In many African countries, including Nigeria, Social Studies was introduced into school curricula following the 1968 Mombassa conference where the African Social Studies Programme (ASSP) was launched as continental strategy for citizenship training, the emergent quest for nation building and national development (Ogunyemi 2003). As Kissock (1981) reports, Social Studies was introduced in Sierra Leone purposely to improve the self-image of people in the society after a colonial experience. It was introduced in Ghana as a strategy for addressing the challenge of the economy after military rule while it was to transform the political culture in Ethiopia. The introduction of Social Studies in Nigeria was mainly to inculcate concept of nationalism, unity and independence among the citizens of the new ‘nation’ with diverse population (Kissock 1981; Udoh 1989).

Generally, Social Studies, as a school subject, is associated with attributes like social-engineering, broad-based learning, experimental development, eclectism and relativism. Social Studies education agreed that the subject must complement other social institutions (family, polity, relation, etc) while promoting social action for change in the drive towards the national goals.

The subject is broad-based because of its multidimensional (sociological, historical, economical, etc) approach to issues, believing that human problems require several perspective for solution. Social studies promote experimental approach to learning by encouraging more of activities than theory. Eclectism in Social Studies education underscores its dynamic nature as amply illustrated with the introduction of computer-based instruction and the use of internet which enable learners capture events as they unfold with or without intervention of the physical teacher. Social Studies programmes are unavoidably relative to the environments where they are produced due to the variations in what nation-states and societies regard as their priorities at given stages of their development (Kissock 1981, Ogunyemi 2003).

Right from its inception in the country, the potentials of the Nigerian Social Studies programme in promoting value and ethos of nation-building, interculturalism and effective citizenship has never been in doubt. The objective of its teaching in secondary schools, for example, clearly attests to this. Social Studies education is taught to develop the learners’ capacity to learn and acquire basic skills including those of listening, reading, speaking, writing and calculation. It is also taught to ensure the acquisition of the relevant body of knowledge and information, which is an essential prerequisite to personal development and to the making of a positive contribution to the betterment of the society as a whole. In addition, the Nigerian Social Studies aim at creating awareness and understanding of the country’s physical environment and the evolving social and cultural processes. Furthermore Social Studies is taught to develop the students ability for a rational utilization of the country’s cultural, spiritual and natural resources and their conservation for national development. Also, the teaching of
Social Studies is expected to make students appreciate the diversity and interdependence of all members of the local and the national communities and the need for co-operation for the unity of the country and international understanding (emphasis added). Lastly, Nigerian Social Studies education is designed to inculcate positive attitudes and appropriate values of honesty, integrity, hard-work, fairness, justice and togetherness for the development of the nation (emphasis added) (Federal Ministry of Education, 1985).

The last two objectives of the secondary school Social Studies clearly show that the school subject is a fertile ground for the infusion of intercultural education principles, concepts and strategies for the purpose of producing more effective citizenry in the course of Nigeria’s striving for nationhood. Indeed, a close study of the revised edition of National Policy on Education (FRN. 1998:14, 18) reveals that the subject’s nomenclatures at the primary and junior secondary school levels have since been changed to “Social Studies and Citizenship Education”. This is a positive development which could possibly clear the confusion that attended to the curriculum misadventure of the mid-1980 when another “Hobson’s choice” subject called “Citizenship Education” was to be foisted on the Nigerian school time-table (Ogunyemi, 1998).

Emergent Issues and Challenges

Making the Nigeria Social Studies programme the anchor for intercultural education and, thus improved citizenship education in Nigeria schools throws up a number of issues and challenges. Firstly, the concept of interculturalism needs to be properly conceptualized in the Nigerian context in view of its associated variants such as intra-culturalism, multiculturalism and transculturalism, which are popular in western literature. Should more emphasis be placed on intra-cultural education than multicultural education or vice-versa given the peculiar nature of country’s flashpoints, (e.g. intra and inter-community crisis as recorded between Ife and Modakeke as well as within Modakeke Township in recent years?) This and many others have led to loss of lives and properties in Nigeria. This calls for further brainstorming on the specific framework and dimensions of intercultural education that will be most relevant to the Nigerian school system and the Nigeria Social Studies in particular.

Another issue that requires urgent attention is ample research to determine needs and gaps in existing Social Studies curricular. The Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) statutorily saddled with the responsibility for curriculum innovation and development in the country, is particularly challenged to provide the leadership for meeting this emergent need of baseline studies into school curricula in general and Social Studies programmes in particular. Meanwhile, researchers in the universities, polytechnics and colleges with relevant background and research interests can seize the initiative with a view to generating a robust data pool which could be tapped in near future for the needed curriculum review exercise.

One other issue that must not be ignored here is official tardiness that usually holds back laudable curriculum projects in the country. This is exemplified by
curricular integration projects in population and environmental education that commenced almost two decades ago but are yet to effectively find their way into the school Social Studies (Ogunyemi, 1998). Such lackadaisical attitude often makes mockery of the whole curriculum review and development exercise and creates serious disjuncture in using the school to address the problems of the society. While such attitude may possibly be tolerated in other school subjects, it is quite unacceptable in Social Studies because of its efforts in producing effective citizenship in a rapidly changing society

Conclusion and Recommendation

Urgent action are required for tackling the new wave of ethno-religious violence which has greatly impaired Nigeria’s move towards building a united, free and democratic nation. While efforts at nation building and promotion of effective citizenship had followed different pathways, ranging from the structural through the cultural to the Marxist, developments in the post-Soviet Union world suggests an agreement with Galtung’s (2003) recommendation that nation-state should “pick the best from all” for achieving a transcultural society with respect for political freedom without neglecting the basic needs of all and sundry. Intercultural and peace education through Social Studies has unparalleled potency for achieving this transculturalism particularly within the school system. For the Nigerian Social Studies to play this role effectively, relevant concepts must be properly conceptualized while government must demonstrate more than ‘paper interest’ in according the subject its rightful place in the scheme of things.

References


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