

LANGUAGE AND CONFLICT IN NIGERIAN FAMILIES: IMPLICATION FOR FOUNDATION IN CIVIC EDUCATION

Abstract

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The family is a foundation of any society. In this wise, societal concerns are extensions of family concerns. The current outcry against the loss of basic moral values in our society therefore has strong links with the same phenomenon at family levels. This paper presents a report of a survey carried out to determine how conflict is manifested in verbal and non-verbal forms of communication in the Nigerian middle class homes. Observation and interview techniques were used to collect data. The analysis of data showed a preponderance of swear words in Nigerian middle class homes, a situation which created room for uncivil behaviours like lack of respect, disobedience and loss of other moral values. The paper recommend an interdisciplinary approach to civic education with counsellors working closely with civic education theorists to reverse the uncivil environment in which children are bred at home. This, the paper envisages is one way in which a basic foundation for civic education can be laid.

Introduction

Civic education is a multi-disciplinary approach to the study of the rights and responsibilities of citizens. It embraces history, education, ethics, political science, sociology, law, culture, the arts, religion and health education. The concepts of rights and responsibilities deriving from civic education immediately call to mind the dispositions of the citizenry whose rights and responsibilities are the subject of study. Fair play, honesty, hardwork and patriotism are a few of the virtues one expects of the citizenry of any country in return for services rendered by the government of the day.

If on the other hand, there is evidence of a break down of law and order as manifested in Nigeria in the violent ethnic clashes, loss of moral values, crime and high rates of school drop outs/failures then the virtues of fair play, hardwork, patriotism and honesty and lost and need to be revived through more concerted efforts by government and other relevant agencies of change.

Civic education seeks to bring about positive changes in attitudes, behaviours and skills of the citizenry so that they (citizenry) will be more aware of their rights and responsibilities. The medium for all human interaction which is manifested in attitudes and behaviours is language. Thus a gap in the social order can only be identified through manifestations of human behaviours and attitudes expressed in human language. This paper identifies conflict situations in Nigerian families as one of such gaps. Its manifestations is seen clearly in the preponderance of abrasive language use exhibited by parents and children at home.

Civility and Education

The word "civility" is recorded as being synonymous with about eleven others as follows: Courtesy,, Courteousness,, Good manners, Graciousness, Cordiality, pleasantness, Geniality, Affability, Amiability, Urbanity, Gallantry (Nixon, 1999) A civil person is thus one that has all the qualities listed above plus being refined, cultivated, polished, cultured, and generally well-bred. Those are the qualities which any form of education seeks to inculcate in individuals. From this perspective therefore education can be said to be a process of civilizing. To civilize on the other hand would be to enlighten, educate, cultivate, instruct, improve, refine, polish, domesticate, socialize, humanize, edify (Nixon, 1999).

Civic education, therefore, has to do with ensuring the survival of man in a civilized world where respect, justice and peace reign.

According to Kymlicka (1991:186), each person has a naturally or divinely-ordained place or function in the world from which his/her duties follow". As teachers, parents, administrators of schools, students etc, people have rights and responsibilities which must be adhered to for peace to reign. Kymlicka (1991), states further that all people are by nature free and equal, but that social norms can only be enforced if there is a system put in place whereby some people are in a position to

govern while others follow. Again, naturally, students look up to the teachers and children look up to their parents for guidance and government.

Parents and teachers have not been spared in the outcry-against moral decadence in which our society has fallen. Indices of this state of affairs abound as follows: broken homes; increasing numbers of abandoned children in motherless babies homes and remand homes; teenage pregnancies, school failures (strikes, examination malpractice, cultism, truancy), crime, insubordination, theft and violence. The list is endless. Parents are accused of having abandoned their God given duties of giving their children adequate home training while teachers on the other hand have accused of paying lip services to the profession. The values and rules of behaviours that are necessary for the society to function well are therefore lost between the home and the school.

In no other medium is this loss of morality more evident than in spoken language which is of course, the basic form of human communication. It is also expressive of desires, attitudes and perceptions and is reflective of a people's ethical standard. The concern for the use of abrasive words and expressions in Nigerian homes arose from this same premise that language reflects culture. The fact that there is a large repertoire of swear words in Nigerian homes may be a pointer to the conflict-ridden society in which we live. It reflects an uncivil society where courtesy, goodmannerliness, gentility etc are lacking. The need to bring about a change of direction in this regard becomes increasingly important.

Civility and Civil Rights

The Nigerian Constitution of 1999 lists the following as fundamental Human Rights:

Right to life

Right to dignity of human person

Right to fair hearing

Right to private and family life

Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion

Right to freedom of expression and the press

Right to peaceful assembly and association

Right to freedom of movement

Right to freedom from discrimination

Right to acquire and own immovable

Property anywhere in Nigeria.

These rights according to Schineller (2002: 12), are re-echoed in other charters of Human Rights including the United Nations (UN) Charter Rights. A summary of these rights is succinctly captured by Schineller as follows:

- Right to the means for proper development of life, particularly foods, clothing, shelter, medical care, rest, necessary social services....
- Right to be respected, right to his or good name.
- Right to be accurately informed about public events.

We are also reminded that these basic human rights are based upon the dignity of the human person and so they are God-given, not government given. They are divine rights.

The focus of civic education is rightly on rights and responsibilities, implying that one complements the other. Ethically, this is in the realm of social contract theories and aptly expressed by Pope John XXIII in Schineller (2002:11):

The natural rights of which we speak are inextricably bound up with as many duties, all applying to one and the same person. These rights and duties derive their origin, their sustenance, and their indestructibility from the natural law, which in conferring the one imposes the other... thus. The right to live involves the duty to preserve... life. * the right to be respected involves the duty to show respect* (my insertion).

From the foregoing, it is invariably true that the desire of parents to reverse the present order of lawlessness and incivility in the society should begin in the home. Homes that exhibit uncivil behaviours through language use are likely to extend same to the larger society.

Problem Statement

Language is a means through which societal values, cultures and traditions are transmitted from one generation to another. It is indeed, the expressive medium of civic education. Like culture to which it bears great affinity, language is dynamic. Shifts in social values are also reflected in language use. This research sought to find out whether the language of parents and children at home, particularly those in middle class homes, have a direct bearing to their rights and responsibilities; the problem being that if parents and children use language that portrays disrespect and bad manners then efforts made in civic education will have been wasted.

Research Questions

To guide this research, the following questions were postulated:

- When do parents and children use abrasive words/ expressions in their homes?
- How do parents and children react to the use of abrasive words in the home?

Methodology

Eight middle class families were selected within the vicinity of the researcher for case of observation and interview (where the need arose), hi all homes both parents were working and had to leave home for some hours everyday. Observation were done unobtrusively to avoid bias, i.e. the families were not informed that they were under observation. This was possible because of the familiarity of the researcher with the families under observation. The data was collected based on a generic checklist which categorized abrasive words and expressions into six as shown below (the checklist was validated by colleagues in the Faculty of Education) A: Reference to people as animals B: Describing physical formations/ malformations C: Using threats

D: Questioning people's intelligence E:

Negative references to family backgrounds

F: Likening people to the devil.

Presentation of Data and Discussion of Findings

The data collected were presented in the tables below. The abrasive words/expressions are presented in their translated form for the ease of it.

Table I: List of Conflict Situations that Led to use of Abrasive Words/ Expressions.

Parent- children	Children- children
Failure to carry out instruction due to:	• Appropriation of property >
Forgetfulness	• Rough play
Outright refusal	• Refusal to share property/meals •
Inability to complete an assignment due to:	•Refusal by a junior to run errands for a senior
Laziness	• Taking up other's space (bed, chair, rug/ carpet, mother's lap etc) >
Watching TV	
Playing •	
Loss of household items •	
Damage of household items •	
Absence from family/ gathering •	
Absent mindedness while performing chores	
Display of unhygienic habits	

Table 2: List of Abrasive/ Swear Words Used by Parents and Children.

Parents on Children	Children on children
Group A: Animal Metaphor	
Monkey	Monkey
Goat	Goat
Sheep	Monster
Dog	
Group B: Physical Formation/ Malformation	
*** Big head <*	Tiny legs Crooked
Long teeth <*	legs Big belle
Rotten mouth	(Stomach)
Group C: Threats	
I will beat flog, cane. . . I will show you pepper	Kill, maim, Stagger, rake, slap Beat, deal with, bite
Group D: Reference to Intelligence	

Foolish Idiot 'mumu' 'mumu'	
Group E: Negative Reference to Family Background	
Parents- Children	Children -Children "your family is wretched" "your papa no get motor" "una no de eat good food for una house"
Group f: Devil Metaphor	
Parents to Children	Children to children
Witch Devil Stone heart	Witch Devil Evil

Non verbal indicators of violence were observed mainly among the children. For the most parts, parents just ended up shouting and raving at their errant children without use of physical violence. There was however noticed signs of disaffection after each bout of raving and this manifested in refusal to children's demands by the parents. At one visit for instance, a mother refused to cook for the children when they (children) failed to collect firewood. Even after 1 had offered kerosene for her stove, she felt the children needed to learn a lesson.

Children (especially from ages 3-8 years) were prone to violent demonstration of their anger. They were therefore constantly following up their threats will real actions especially when parents are out of the house.

In all the homes visited, there was no open confrontation (exchange of abrasive words) between the parents and the children. Most of the children were of ages 3-13 years.

Conflict situations that result to the use of abrasive words and expressions by parents and children are bound to occur in homes where there are growing children. These conflicts have to do directly with an individual's rights and responsibilities as shown by the data collected. When children fail in their responsibilities, they are bound to be reprimanded by their parents. Children also have rights to which they cling and by-which they make demands of their parents-a situation that may bring about conflict if right and responsibilities are *not properly aligned*.

These conflict situations are most often made manifest in language use. Parents and children use abrasive words and expression of all sorts when they are angered. Speech generally is a natural outlet for anger and frustration. However where this outlet is likely to upset the entire system, care must be taken to control it so that its tide is stemmed.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

1. Guidance Coussellers should work closely with civic education theorists to develop a blue print of creating a more civic environment in Nigerian homes thought public enlightenment campaigns counselling.
2. Counselling opportunities should be provided for working parents at their place of work. This will provide an outlet for them to sort out home front conflicts.
3. The dearth of easy-to-read books for children on civic education should be checked. More concerted efforts should be made by NACT to publish small easy- to-read pamphlets for parents for parents and children.

Summary and Conclusion

Language is the medium for all human expression and learning. Without language, very little can be achieved in this regard. As a medium of instruction, it has been said to be a crucial factor in student's performance. As a transmitter of social values and norms, it has been likened to culture itself and central to perception of the human environment. How people perceive their environment and how they make meaning out of it is to said to be closely linked with their language.

Civic education has to do with educating people to their rights and responsibilities. Apart from issues of governance, the rule of law and other related civic matters, civic education basically deals with ensuring a civil society where civility reigns. The family is the bedrock of society,

therefore civility should begin at home. This paper has looked at the concept of civility from the perspective of the typically middle class Nigerian home. The many conflict situations that make parents and children to use abrasive words and expressions are seen as a threat to the success of civic education. Civic education seeks to make parents more responsive to the needs of the children and to awaken children to their own responsibilities towards their parents and the society at large. Any display of uncivil behaviour at home is therefore a negation of the tenets of civic education and should be checked

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