MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION AS A TOOL FOR FOSTERING PEACE AND UNITY

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Abstract
Nigeria is a culturally pluralistic nation. God has graciously carved the land mass that all abundance of blessings flow from it. Nigeria is enriched with two distinct religious sects; Christians and Muslims. The river Niger and Benue as well as their tributaries stretch from North to South signaling oneness. However, the challenges of internecine feuds, religious intolerance and so on taking their toll on the country show that there is a disconnect between the people which necessitates cross-cultural and intercultural relations and hence multicultural education. This can be attained by the integration of multicultural education into our school system at all levels especially in the senior secondary school. Offering the course in the form of social studies in basic education alone may not be enough to make impact on the mind set of our teeming youths. It is recommended that multicultural education should be woven into all subjects so that it can be the fabrics of teaching/learning in the school system; making social studies compulsory in all classes is also recommended as a way of making children to fully imbibe virtues that will promote unity in diversity as they grow to adulthood.

The world today is entangled with the challenges of finding a common denominator for solution to problems that impinge on peaceful coexistence such as ethnicity, racism, tribalism, terrorism etc. Nigeria is not left out as we are beset with insurgencies arising from a wide array of factors such as religion, political, ethnicity, education imbalance and so on. Religious extremism has reared its ugly head in every facet of our national life and expresses thus: in the South, Christian education is
emphasized while in the North, Islamic education is being emphasized. All these anomalies happening in different permutations along ethnic divide have manifested in youth militancy, Boko Haran scourge, hatred and so on, thereby threatening peace and unity in our nation. One wonders if the 1914 deal of amalgamation of North and South protectorate is a blessing or a curse. Worst still, governmental dealings and political affiliations seem based on ethnicity and it is tearing the country apart. While approaches such as military incursion and national dialogue may be expedient as an immediate solution, a more comprehensive approach that is grassroots and inclusive is antidote to the anomalies currently taking place in the country. Hence multicultural education is apt as a topic of discourse in our national life.

Education is the art of imparting ideas, skills and knowledge into an individual which will define or shape his course of action in life. It is a means of perpetuating the culture and belief of a people from generation to generation. Hence Ocho (2010) maintained that education is a societal instrument for its survival, growth and development. He went further to state that the central purpose of education is to transmit those values that will enable the society live in peace and happiness, feed and protect itself from inside or outside forces of disintegration, grow and develop numerically, physically, economically and socially.

Multiculture is a term that is coined from multi and culture. Multi means many or more than one, while culture is a way of life of a people embracing food, dressing, religion, marriage, beliefs and others. Samuel (2011) citing Damen (1987) defined culture as learned and shared human patterns or models for living day-to-day living patterns. Multicultural education therefore provides education that is inclusive taking into consideration the kaleidoscope of learners. Unity is a quality of being in one accord or harmony. Peace on the other hand is absence of hostility thereby leading to a healthy interpersonal relationship. Without unity and peace, meaningful development cannot take place in a nation. Multicultural education is therefore aimed at fostering unity and peace in a country by critically examining, respecting, adapting and socializing with other people’s culture in order to create harmonious relationship with each other. Formal education is therefore a veritable channel for transmitting cultural values through various subjects taught.

According to Geneva (2013), virtually all aspects of multicultural education are interdisciplinary. Teachers need to model curricular and instructional practices in classroom to integrate multicultural perspective. Thus religion studies, Food and nutrition, literature, history and physics, history and so on can bring out ontological and anthological ideas of multicultural dimension. In line with this notion, Omatseye (2005) posited that the missing link in our state schools is where religion and religious practices are excluded giving rise to a hollowness in life, without anchor, without a stabilizing and
It is his opinion that the absence of God in any situation leaves a vacuum or a deep sense of emptiness in the soul of the individual.

It is however noted that in a cultural pluralistic society there is the exogenous cultural display and to live in harmony, the coexisting groups must exhibit behavioral commitment of tolerance to enhance the cooperate existence of one another. The school has responsibility for attaining this. Nigeria can take clue from Chinese Ministry of Education and the State Ethnic Affairs Commission who had decided to make national unity compulsory for classroom instruction and college entrance examinations, China Daily (2009).

Importance of Multicultural Education

Multicultural education bothers on issues of cross-cultural and intercultural integration and should be germane in dialogue of national unity. Although, everyone is born into a culture, it can be modified, bad aspect discarded and enculturation can take place to suit prevailing circumstances. According to Samuel (2009), multiculturalism is about challenging everyone academically; ending segregated programmes; valuing differences, and recognizing all cultures as significant in the mainstream curriculum. As Nigeria prepares for the National Political Conference, it hoped that stakeholders in education and indeed Nigerians will take multiculturalism in front burner of achieving unity in Nigeria. Culture should be an instrument for uniting Nigerians instead of disintegrating people.

Multicultural education can contribute to national peace and unity as it can bring about acculturation; tolerance; religious cohesion and dissolves the impact of ethnocentric tendencies. The multicultural nature of the Nigerian society makes it imperative for the incorporation of multicultural education at all levels of education as well as teaching it through the various education programmes and school subjects by adopting a suitable approach. While acknowledging globalization as instrument of cultural integration, Nigeria will take a cue from China. According to Samuel (2010), China’s 5,000 years of history and culture included contacts with foreigners and foreign culture but adapted foreign cultural influences rather than assimilated them.

The writer employs the Allport (1954) Contact Hypothesis, also known as Intergroup Contact Theory to illustrate multinational education in this context. The premise of Allport's theory is that under appropriate conditions interpersonal contact is one of the most effective ways to reduce prejudice between majority and minority group members. He noted that if one has the opportunity to communicate with others, they are able to understand and appreciate different points of views involving their way of life. As a result of new appreciation and understanding, prejudice should diminish. Issues of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination are commonly occurring issues between rival
Allport's proposal was that properly managed contact between the groups should reduce these problems and lead to better interactions. The gains of multicultural education may not be immediate but over the years’ attitudes, values may be redressed.

**Multicultural Education in Formal Education in Nigeria**

Education is a veritable instrument for transmitting culture and ideas from generation to generation. The Federal Government of Nigeria therefore took a bold step to use education as instrument of development in the policy statement as encapsulated in the National Policy of Education in Nigeria, 2004. As FRN (2004) stated “A nation’s policy on education is government’s way of realizing that part of the national goals which can be achieved using education as a tool” Thus the overall philosophy and goals of the nation are:

a) Live in unity and harmony as one indivisible, indissoluble, democratic and sovereign nation founded on the principles of freedom, equality and justice;

b) Promote inter-African solidarity and world peace through understanding

The five main national goals of Nigeria, which have been endorsed as the necessary foundation for the National Policy on Education, are the building of:

a) A free and democratic society;

b) A just and egalitarian society;

c) A great and dynamic economy

d) A land full of bright opportunities for all citizens

The primary school curriculum categorically stated that in pursuance of the goals of education, language of the environment, English, French and Arabic, social studies and citizenship education, cultural art etc, shall be studied. In the junior secondary school, the curriculum include English, French, Mathematics, language of the environment to be taught, one major Nigerian language other than that of the environment, integrated science, social studies and citizenship education, introductory technology. For senior secondary, the curriculum include English language, Mathematics, a major Nigerian language, one of biology, chemistry, physics or health science, one of literature-in-English, history, geography or religious studies, a vocational subject. Nigeria has recently woken up from slumber and now included basic science, civic education, cultural and creative arts in Basic Education; insurance, store management, civic education, entrepreneurial studies, photography, plumbing and so on in the SSS to respond to the joblessness and civil turbulence situations of Nigerians.

**The Missing Link between the Policy and Implementation**

The NPE seems not to have addressed issues bothering on multicultural education that are germane to attain the much desired unity and peace in our nation. Using language as an example, one wonders if the schools implement the policy fully
and if there are teachers to teach these Nigerian languages in different geographical zones of the country. It is a known fact that in Delta state for example, no major Nigeria language is taught and written in the Junior Secondary School Examination. In the senior secondary school aspect, there is also no enrolment of Deltans in the three Nigerian major languages in senior school leaving certificate as these languages are not taught. Instead, what is being emphasized is the language of the local environment at the basic education level. Teaching of the local language is quite good but it does not imply a national outlook of multi-languages embedded in our multicultural heritage. Here lies the problems of attaining multicultural education in Nigeria.

Although multicultural education is carried out in such subjects like social studies, it stops at basic education. What this paper is advocating is extending multicultural education in form of social studies compulsorily at the senior secondary level of education which is a critical stage of youth development. Thus at senior secondary and even tertiary education, multicultural education in form of social studies, Nigerian language and other aspects of our national life must be taught as core subjects and also be integrated into all courses. The constant encounter of multicultural tenets in any level of education may likely promote national unity and peace in the long run.

School as Multicultural Education Promotion Agent

A school is a formal and institutionalized organization that engages in passing skill, knowledge to generation of people through teaching and learning. Schools are therefore agents of change. Curriculum planning of content must include multicultural features such as food, dressing, festivals, language, religion etc. The school activities have to be coordinated to prevent ethnicity, prejudice, hatred and other vices. Hence, social studies education as a subject in primary and secondary schools, or as a field of disciplined inquiry, or an education studies in tertiary institutions is vital. Social studies is a critical study of human culture in relationship with individuals in the society. Social studies is therefore one veritable source of fostering integration between people of different culture. Hence Ireyefoju and Ireyefoju (2010) maintained that Social Studies is a human construct that fosters nationalism and patriotism on the one hand and for man to realize his existent as both individual and citizen in a multicultural society. Geneva (2013) gave an insight into what curriculum of multicultural education can embrace as follows: Creating learning goals and objectives that incorporate multicultural aspect, such as developing students’ ability to write persuasively about social justice concerns; using a frequency matrix to ensure that the teacher includes a wide variety of ethnic groups in a wide variety of ways in curriculum materials and instructional activities; introducing different ethnic groups and their contributions on a rotating basis; Including several examples from different ethnic experiences to explain subject matter concepts, facts and skills; and showing how multicultural concepts, goals and activities intersect with subject-specific curricular standards.
UNESCO (2006) maintained that the aims of intercultural education should be broadly based on the pillars of: learning to know by combining sufficiently broad general knowledge with the opportunity to work in-depth on a small number of projects; learning to do, in order to “acquire not only an occupational skill but also, more broadly, the competence to deal with many situations and to work in teams; learning to live together, by “developing an understanding of other people and an appreciation of interdependence and learning to be, “so as to better develop one’s personality and be able to act with ever greater autonomy, judgment and personal response. Banks (2005) advocated knowledge construction process whereby teachers help students to understand, investigate, and determine the implicit cultural assumptions and frames of reference and perspectives of the discipline they are teaching.

The late sage, Fafunwa (1974) once noted that there is indeed no greater force for social economic and political advancement than a good educational system realistically organized and judiciously administered with skill and insight. The school curriculum can integrate areas of our national life that can inculcate virtues and values which will help to promote unity and peace such as festivals, dances, religion, dirge, riddles, folklore, history of great men who are of national pride in both science, art, sports, field trip and so on into various subjects taught in classes for students to have critical analysis of life to be rational men created in the image of God irrespective of religion and creed. Figure 1 gives an insight into components and ingredients of achieving multicultural education.
Figure 1: Multicultural Education Model.

Sources: Adapted from
(2) Geneva Gay (2013). The Importance of Multicultural Education. Educational leadership, 30-34
Pristine

The above figure shows that the school is the main actor in inculcating multicultural education. However, there must be a synergy between the society and family since the school is a social system whose output will go back to the society.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, multicultural education could be said to be a remedy to the current bloodletting and hatred pervading our country. Teachers owe the generation a duty to culturally integrate the children and dissolve ethnocentric vices, religious intolerance, hatred, greed and so on that are currently tearing the nation apart by integrating multicultural values into school curriculum. In the same vein, the society, family, religious bodies must teach virtues that accentuate peace and unity of the country.

Recommendations

The following are suggested as means of fast tracking multicultural education in Nigeria.

1. Strengthening of Universal Basic Education. Nigeria is currently providing basic education. What needs to be done is full support in terms of ensuring that every school going age child is in school and equity in funding. As at now, there are still street children who engage in one form of trading or business venture or the other. This act must be stopped. The enforcement of law of sanction on parents who do not allow their children to go to school must be in full force. Delta state has started on a good note by having Education Marshall who monitors implementation of basic education especially street children. This is because education is a weapon of emancipating people from ignorance, religious bigotry and other vices.

2. Offering social studies up to senior secondary school as well as integrating multicultural education in all subjects.

3. Language in Nigeria. There are three ethnic languages recommended for national dialogue: Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba. Although there are other languages in various ethnic groups, the usage of these three main languages in communication in the school can help in bringing national unity that could help to promote peace. These subjects should be taught at all levels of the educational system. This is because language is one of the forces of unity between people. Just as English and Mathematics are core subjects, multicultural courses like our three indigenous languages should also be compulsory as a WAEC and NECO core subject. It does not matter if many subjects are offered; after all, the essence of education is to be relevant to oneself and the society.
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4. Our school system should dissolve ethnicity in dressing as it is being done in France. Dressing code that is all embracive in the school system should be promoted in Nigeria for both tribe and creed as uniform.

5. There should be frantic effort to supervise the implementation of the multicultural dimension of the school curriculum.

6. Teachers should be recruited into the educational system for the purpose of teaching multicultural education.

7. International Institute for Educational Planning (2003) advocated “glocal” curricula, namely curricula that are sensitive to both global and local challenges though not necessarily identical worldwide.

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