MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION: A PANACEA TO ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION

— — — — — — — — — — — —

Sunday Oyerinde FABODE
Department of Social Studies,
St. Augustine's College of Education,

Abstract

This paper focuses on the need to introduce Multi Cultural Education into the Nigerian primary and secondary curricula as solutions to persistent ethno-religious crises which threatened the integration of the country. The paper reviews works related to the geographic entity called Nigeria today and traced its history to the 1914 amalgamation of the then Northern protectorate and Southern protectorate by the British government. It also considers the tribes found in Nigeria today as those who had existed in forms of different nations and which later aggregated into multi-ethnic nations with over two hundred (200) groups speaking over two hundred and fifty (250) languages spread across the major ethnic groups, Hausa/Fulani, Igbo, Yoruba, etc. The paper thus acknowledges the plural nature of Nigeria and considers it as the source of constant feeling of distrust between the component units and the fear of one ethnic or religious group dominating the other; and hence being responsible for the various forms of intertribal, political and religious disturbances that have threatened the unity

of the country since independence.

Introduction

Nigeria is a plural society in terms of its multi-ethnic and multi-religious nature. The country has more than 400 ethnic groups (Suberu, 1998) and two of major religions (Islam and Christianity). Of all the federal democracies in the world, only India can match Nigeria's cultural complexity (Joseph, 2006). If well managed, these factors of unity in diversity would have been major assets to the Nigeria state, but contrary is the case. Nigeria cultural diversity is threatening the peace and existence of Nigeria as a country. Salawu (2010) opined that over the years the phenomena of ethnicity and religious intolerance have led to the incessant recurrence of ethno-religious conflict, which have given birth to many ethnic militias like Odua People Congress (OPC), the Bakassi Boys, the Egbesu boys, the Ijaw Youth Congress (IYC), and the Igbo People Congress (IPC). Others include Arewa People Congress (APC), the Movement for the Actualisation of Sovereign State of the Biafra (MASSOB) and Ohanaeze N'digbo. With the emergence of these ethnic militias and deep divides between the various ethnic groups, religious intolerance has become more violent and bloody with emergence of Boko Haram who introduced a new dimension to ethno-religious conflict with the use of suicide bombers to wreck havoc on the people of Borno, Bauchi, Yobe, Kaduna states etc.

While it is true that it is not possible to know the exact number of ethno-religious conflicts due to lack of adequate statistical data on the issue (Salawu, 2001). It is interesting to note According to Olu-Adeyemi (2006) that about forty ethno-religious clashes happened between May 1999 and September 2000, thus signalling an average of one bloody clash per month since Nigeria return to democracy. Also, because of the violent nature of ethno-religious conflicts, which often take the form of riots, sabotage, assassination, armed struggle, guerrilla and war fare and secession in Nigeria, they no doubt have implication for the security of lives and properties and existence of Nigeria as a nation. Several conscious efforts have been made by the government to maintain peace and stability in Nigeria without much success. For instance, the inauguration of council of inter-religious harmony by the federal government. This council is co-headed by the sultan of Sokoto, the president of the supreme council for Islamic

affairs and the national president of the Christian Association of Nigeria.

Various suggestion from well-meaning individuals are being made to ensure that Nigeria remain an integrated statehood where every Nigerian will not consider himself as a Yoruba, Igbo or Hausa and so on. In other word a Nigeria in which a positive acceptance of races, religious and culture and recognises such diversities as healthy.

In view of this, this paper identifies multi cultural Education as panacea to problem caused by cultural differences. The paper also suggested the introduction of multi-cultural education into educational system of Nigeria especially at primary and secondary levels of education as it will go a long way to promote unity and cooperation among the different culturally diverse people of Nigeria.

The ethnic composition of Nigeria

The entity called Nigeria today came into being as a result of amalgamation of the then Northern protectorate and Southern Protectorate of British government in 1914 by Lord Fredrick Lugard. Jekayinfa(2002) opined that Nigeria is a colonial creation. The tribes found in Nigeria today existed in form of different nations. Awolowo(1947) pointed out that Nigeria was "a mere-geographical expression". This means that in terms of social relation and national identification, Nigeria was not yet a nation by 1947. This kind of situation is still a common occurrence among tribes in Nigeria today. Nigeria is a multi-ethnic nation with over 200 groups speaking over 250 languages. Among the widely used indigenous languages are Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Edo, Idoma, Fulfulde, Ibibio, Fulani and Efik. (Falola, 1999). Falola further explained that about 21 percent of the population is Hausa speakers, 20 percent are Yoruba, 17 percent Igbo, and 7 percent Fulani and others 25 percent. A host of minority groups speak other languages. In corroboration, Dada (1994) stated that Nigeria has been credited with having between 400 to 513 languages. In any case, the most conservative figure is 250 (Bamgbose,1976). These would not include what we popularly called dialects. The religious life of Nigerians is equally diverse; Muslim are concentrated in the north and south west, constituting about 50% of the population; Christians make up about 40 percent with a concentration in the south and the middle

belt; the rest of the population practices one form of indigenous religion or another.

Diary of communal and Ethno-Religious Crisis in Nigeria

By ethno-religious conflict, it means a situation in which the relationship between members of one ethnic or religious group and another of such group in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society is characterized by lack of cordiality, mutual suspicion and fear, and a tendency towards violent confrontation. (Salawu, 2010). Thus, before the present democratic experiment in Nigeria, there were ethno-religious conflicts that claimed so many lives and property (Mohammed, 2005). Notable among such crises are the Maitatsine religious disturbances in parts of Kano and Maiduguri in the early 1980s; Jimeta-Yola religious disturbances (1984), and Zango Kataf crises in Kaduna State (1992). Others are Kafanchan College of Education Muslim Christian riots; Kaduna Polytechnic Muslim-Christian skirmishes (1981 1982); and the cross vs. the crescent conflict at the University of Ibadan (1981-1985). Yet other early ethno-religious conflicts include the Bulumkutu Christian-Muslim riots (1982); Usman Danfodio University Sokoto (1982); and the Muslim-Christian Clash during a Christian procession at Easter in Ilorin, Kwara State (1986).

In corroboration Olu-Adeyemi (2006) reveals that about forty ethno-religious clashes happened between May 1999 and September 2000, thus signalling an average of one bloody clash per month since the return to democracy. An attempt is made below to show case these occurrences:

May 30-June 9, 1999: Renewed Warri communal clash in Delta State.

July 18, 1999: Oodua People's Congress and Hausa traders clashed at Sagamu, Ogun State.

November 25, 1999: Communal clash in Lagos between Oodua People's Congress and Hausa traders.

January 25, 2000: Communal clash in Brass Local Government area of Bayelsa State.

January 29, 2000: Communal clash in Etsako Local Government area

of Edo State.

January 30, 2000: Communal clash at Etsako Local Government area of Edo State

February 2, 2000: Boundary dispute between communities in Akwa Ibom and Cross Rivers State.

February 21, 2000: Sharia riots in Kaduna.

February 28, 2000: Religious riots in Aba, Abia State, reprisal killing from the Kaduna mayhem.

March 5, 2000: Epoch of Ife – Modakeke war of attrition.

March 16, 2000: Renewed hostilities between the people of Eleme and Okirika in Rivers State.

March 28, 2000: Religious riots in Damboa, Borno State.

April 8, 2000: Communal clash in Ovia South Local Government area of Edo State.

May 18, 2000: Local farmers and Fulani cattle rearer's clash in Saki, Oyo State.

May 23, 2000: Renewed religious riot in Kaduna.

June 5, 2000: Epoch of the Owo mayhem in Ondo State.

June 12, 2000: Communal clash in Isoko North Local Government area of Edo State.

June 23, 2000: Communal clash between the people of Ikot Offiong and Oku-Iboku of Cross River State.

July 1, 2000: The commencement of communal clash at Ikare Akoko,Ondo State.

July 21, 2000: Renewed hostilities between the Ijaws and Urhobos in Delta State.

August 12, 2000: Communal clash in Bendel Local Government area of Abia State.

August 22, 2000: Violent clash at Agboma community in Epe Local Government area of Lagos State.

October16, 2000: Igbos and Hausa traders clashed at Alaba Rago

market area of Lagos State.

December 11, 2000; Renewed clashes between Ife and Modakeke.

March 13, 2001: Renewed communal clashes at Owo, Ondo State.

April 13, 2001: Religous riot in Kano State

May 12.2001: Communal clash between the Ijaws and Itsekiri of Delta State.

July 2, 2001: Communal clash between Odimodu and Ogulagba communities of Delta State.

July 12, 2000: Ethnic violence in Nassarawa State. September 7,2001:

Religious clash in Jos, Plateau State.

September 16, 2001:Religious Riot in Kano.

September 18, 2001:Religious riot in Benue State.

January 12, 2002: Oodua People's Congress clash at Owo, Ondo State

February 2, 2002

Oodua People's Congress and Hausa people clashed at Idi-Araba, Lagos State.

February 26, 2002: Communal clash between Apprapum and Osatura communities of Cross Rivers State

March 10, 2002: Egbira youth's revolt on Local Government creation

March 30-April 2, 2002: All Peoples Party Intra party clash at Ilorin, Kwara State

August 31, 2002: Communal clash at Ado-Ekiti

September 3, 2002: Renewed communal clashes at Owo, Ondo State.

November 21, 2002: Religious riots in Kaduna State and Abuja

What is multicultural education?
Multicultural education can be described as a system of instruction that attempts to foster cultural pluralism and acknowledges the differences between races and cultures. It takes into consideration the educational needs of a society that contains more than one set of traditions, that is, a mixture of many cultures. This is to help students

understand and appreciate cultural differences and similarities and to recognize the accomplishments of diverse ethnic, racial and socio-economic groups. It aims to transform the ways in which students are instructed by giving equal attention to the contributions of all groups in a society (Swartout-Corbeil and Gale, 2006). Multicultural education is also an intrinsic approach to education and curriculum construction, acknowledging and respecting the contributions which the various racial/ethnic groups have made to society. These contributions are expected to be incorporated into the overall programme of instruction which meets the needs of an ever-changing society - if it must attend to personal and social development of all persons concerned (Rosado, 2007).

Multicultural education as a panacea to ethno-religious conflicts and national integration

The need for national unity and stability is greater now in Nigeria than ever before, especially with rampant ethnic violence and religious crises. Many highly placed Nigerians on the pages of newspapers have often described one- Nigeria as temporarily a dream and Utopia. Education is a potent instrument that can be used to foster peace and unity. Therefore we should evolve a type of education that will inculcate in the learners the ideal of national consciousness and awareness. In essence multicultural education should be introduced to our Primary and Secondary Schools educational system. Multicultural Education is a pedagogical technique or approach of looking at and understanding the problems of how students could inter-relate and learn fast in a society that is filled with conglomerate of cultures, without some of them feeling alienated as a result of their coming from a minority ethnic group or cultures. The expected outcomes of multicultural education are embedded in its definitions, justification and assumptions. They exhibit some clearly discernable patterns while specific goals and related objectives are quite numerous and vary according contextual factors such as school settings, audiences, timing, purposes and perspectives. They fall into seven general clusters. These general clusters, according to Geneva Gay (1988), are ethnic and cultural literacy, personal development, attitude and value clarifications, multicultural social competence, basic skills proficiency,

educational equity and excellence, and empowerment for societal reform. Each one is discussed briefly below in relation to the topic.

Developing Ethnic and Cultural Literacy

One of the primary and persistent reasons for the inclusion of cultural pluralism in school programs is to correct what advocates call "sins of omission and commission." First, we must provide students with information about the history and contributions of ethnic groups who traditionally have been excluded from instructional materials and curricula; and second, we must replace the distorted and biased images of those groups that were included in the curricula with more accurate and significant information. These goals continue to be major concerns of multicultural education, because many students still know too little about the history, heritage, culture, and contributions of other groups. . Groups that are highly visible in the popular culture, such as Yorubas, Hausa, Igbos and Ijaws are somewhat more familiar to students than others that are smaller in number and less accessible in the public press, such as Biroms , Nupes, Jukuns etc. The information about and images of ethnic group members and experiences portrayed in popular culture and mass media are often inaccurate, distorted, superficial, one dimensional, and incomplete.This information should be comprehensive, analytical, and comparative, and should include similarities and differences within and among groups.

This goal is appropriate for both majority students and for those who are members of various ethnic minority groups. Gay (1984) argued that a mistake frequently made by educators is to assume either that members of ethnic minority groups already know their culture and history or that this kind of knowledge is relevant only to them. Multicultural education argues to the contrary. Membership in an ethnic group does not guarantee self knowledge or exclusive ownership of knowledge about that group. Acquiring knowledge about the history, life, and culture of ethnic groups is appropriate for all students because they need to learn more, with greater accuracy, about their own cultural heritages and those of others. Furthermore, knowledge about ethnic pluralism is a necessary foundation for respecting; appreciating, valuing, and celebrating diversity, both nationally and internationally and this may put an end to ethnic

violence and bring about national unity.

Personal Development
The psychological underpinnings of multicultural education explain its emphasis on developing greater self understanding, positive self-concept, and pride in one's ethnic identity. Emphasizing these areas is part of multicultural education's goal of contributing to the personal development of students, which contends that a better sense of self contributes to the overall intellectual, academic, and social achievement of students. Students who feel good about themselves are likely to be more open and receptive to interaction with others and to respect their cultures and identities. This argument is further justified by claims made about the reciprocal relationship between self concept, academic achievement, ethnicity, culture, and individual identity.

Many students have internalized the negative and distorted conceptions of their own and other ethnic groups, a process that has been promoted in larger society. Students from minority groups may be convinced that their heritages have little of value to offer, while those from dominant groups may have inflated notions about their significance. Developing a better understanding of their own and other ethnic groups and cultural experiences can correct these distortions. Multicultural education also helps educators to fulfil the goals of maximizing human potential, meeting individual needs, and teaching the whole child by enhancing feelings of personal worth, confidence, and competence.

Attitudes and Value Clarification
Strong ethnic prejudice and ethnocentric values persist in Nigeria society, based upon and driven by beliefs that have no basis in fact, but are commonly evoked. Several examples illustrate this point. The high illiteracy rates among some northern Nigerians lead some people to believe that these groups are intellectually weak and lazy. The control of most major institutions and power positions by the major ethnic groups in Nigeria cause some people to think that

these positions were acquired because Yorubas, Hausas and Ibos have innate intellectual superiority and are destined to be leaders. Multicultural education also promotes the core values that stem from the principles of human dignity, justice, equality, freedom, self determination, and democracy. The intent is to teach youths to respect and embrace ethnic pluralism, to realize that cultural differences are not synonymous with deficiencies or inferiorities, and to recognize that diversity is an integral part of the human condition and Nigeria live.

Multicultural Social Competence

It is imperative that students learn how to interact with and understand people who are ethnically, racially, and culturally different from themselves. Nigeria and the world are becoming increasingly more diverse, compact, and interdependent. Yet, for most students, the formative years of their lives are spent in ethnically and culturally isolated or encapsulated enclaves. This existence does not adequately prepare them to function effectively in ethnically different environments and multicultural settings. Attempts at cross cultural interactions are often stymied by negative attitudes, values, and expectations; cultural blunders; and by trying to impose rules of social etiquette from one cultural system onto another. The results are often heightened interracial and interethnic group frustrations, anxiety, fears, failures, and hostilities.

Multicultural education can ease these tensions by teaching skills in cross cultural communication, interpersonal relations, perspective taking, contextual analysis, understanding alternative points of view and frames of reference, and analyzing how cultural conditions affect values, attitudes, beliefs, preferences, expectations, and behaviours. It also can help students learn how to understand cultural differences without making hasty and arbitrary value judgments about their intrinsic worth. Attaining these goals can be expedited by providing wide varieties of opportunities for students to practice their cultural competence and to interact with different ethnic peoples, experiences, and situations.

Educational Equity and Excellence

For Nigeria as a nation to free from senseless ethno-religious crises,

the notion of educational equity and excellence should be of primary importance to Nigeria government. Gay (1988) rightly said that educational excellence is unattainable for any student when certain groups are denied a fair chance to receive the highest quality education possible and when some contributions are systematically excluded from the human stories. A situation where there is imbalance in educational attainment among the tribes in Nigeria may bring the notion of inferiority in mind those affected.

While launching Universal Basic Primary Education in Sokoto State, the former Nigerian president, Obasanjo noted that the scheme has one of its objectives, the correction of imbalance in the country. Though the provision of educational balance in country is necessary, it is not sufficient in a country like Nigeria where there is prevalence of ethnic and religious crises. In order to create a society devoid of ethno-religious crises, which multicultural education support, the school curriculum must be so redesigned as to include Multicultural Education that would give the learners experiences needed for national integration. By giving all students more choices about how they will learn, choices that are compatible with their cultural styles, none will be unduly advantaged or disadvantaged at the procedural levels of learning. These choices will lead to closer parallelism (e.g., equity) in opportunities to learn and more comparability in students' achieving the maximum of their own intellectual capabilities (e.g., excellence). Other aspects of this goal include teaching accurate information about all segments of Nigeria society; developing a sense of social consciousness, moral courage, and commitment to equality; and acquiring skills in political activism for reforming society to make it more humane, sympathetic toward cultural pluralism, morally just, and egalitarian. Therefore, the multicultural goal of achieving educational equity and excellence encompasses cognitive, affective, and behavioural skills, as well as the principles of democracy (Banks, 1990, 1991, 1992).

Personal Empowerment for Social Reform
The ultimate goal of multicultural education is to begin a process of change in schools that will ultimately extend to society. This goal will be accomplished by cultivating in students attitudes, values,

habits, and skills so that they can become social change agents who are committed to reforming society in order to eradicate ethnic and racial disparities in opportunities and are willing to act upon this commitment. To do so, they need to improve their knowledge of ethnic issues as well as develop decision making abilities, social action skills, leadership capabilities, a sense of political efficacy, and a moral commitment to human dignity and equality (Banks, 1991). That is, they not only need to understand and appreciate why ethnicity and cultural pluralism are salient features of human life , U.S. society and Nigeria society, but also how to translate this knowledge into decisions and actions related to key socio-political issues, events, concerns, and situations. This goal and related skill development are designed to make society more genuinely egalitarian and more accepting of cultural pluralism. They also are intended to ensure that ethnic and cultural groups that traditionally have been victimized and excluded will become full-fledged participants at all levels of society, with all of the attendant rights, privileges, and responsibilities. This will stop the distrust and suspicion among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria (Obasanjo, 1999) .

Conclusion

It is the belief of this paper that in order to avoid national disintegration and to sustain national unity which is being threatened by various ethno-religious crisis, there is the need for the introduction of Multicultural Education into the curriculum of both primary and secondary schools in Nigeria. This will go a long way to bring stability and unity to Nigeria.

References

Awolowo, Obafemi (1947). Path to Nigerian Freedom London: Faber and Faber Ltd.

Banks, J.A. (1988). Approaches to Multicutltural Curriculum, Multicultural Leader, 1(2), 1 – 3.

Banks, J.A. (2000). Cultural Diversity and Education: (4th Ed.) Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Banks, J A. (1993).Multicultural Education: Development, Dimension

and Challenges, Phi Delta Kappan, 75(1), 22-28

Dada, A. (1994) A Linguistic "No Man's Land" In Nigeria Education. A Faculty Lecture Delivered at the College of Education, University of Ibadan. Faculty Lecture Series. N0.8.

Falola,T. (1999). The History of Nigeria. Westport, CT.Greenwood Press.

Joseph, R. (2006), "Mis-governance and the African predicament: Can the code be broken", Faculty Distinguished Personality Lecture Series 1, Delivered 30 November, Faculty of the Social Sciences, University of Ibadan.

Jekayinfa,A A.(2002) Implications Of Competitive Ethnicity In The Process Of Nation Building In Nigeria. Nigerian Journal of Social Studies. Vol. IV.

Mohammed, H. (2004) Plateau Crises: The Press as the N0 1. Culprit. Daily Trust, June 30.

Obasanjo, O (1999). Ethnic violence -the way out. An address presented to Ijaw, leaders, Port Harcourt.

Olu-Adeyemi, Lanre (2006). Ethno-Religious Conflict and the Travails of National Integrationin Nigeria's fourth Republic. Department of Political Science and Public Administration. Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko.

Oloyede,Is-haq.(2009) Cultural Pluralism as a Challenge to Effectiveness of University Education in Fostering the culture of Dialogue and Understanding. Paper Delivered at 2009 Conference on "The Role of Higher Education in Fostering the culture of Dialougue and Understanding in Nigeria" Notre Dame University. Louaize, Lebanon, November 4-6 2009.

Suberu, T.R. (1998), "States creation and the political economy of Nigerian federalism", in Kunle Amuwo et al (eds.), Federalism and political restructuring in Nigeria, Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited.

Salawu, B. (2010).Ethno-Religious Conflict In Nigeria: Causal Analysis and Proposal for New Management Strategies. European Journal of Social Sciences.13 (3), 345-346.