

USING MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION TO SOLVE ETHNO-RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

Rasheed Adenrele ADETORO

and

Muraina Olugbenga OMIYEFA

Department of Social Studies Federal College of Education, Osiele,
P. M. B. 2096, Abeokuta, Ogun State

Abstract

Multicultural education is to engender peace in all plural societies. Regrettably, all across Nigeria, there is an ever recurring trends of ethno-religious violence like Ife/Modakeke, Ogonis and Andonis, Yoruba/Hausa conflicts in Sagamu and Kano, Zangon/Kataf crises in Kaduna, Jukun/Tiv conflicts in Benue and Taraba States, Jos crises, Sharia crises in the North to mention a few. Thus, this paper explores the valuable role of multicultural education towards curbing ethnic and religious violence in Nigeria. It examines the justifications for multicultural education through communitarian, liberal egalitarian and post-colonial view points. It further gives a catalogue of ethno-religious violence in Nigeria with their causes in the country. Consequently, since well managed conflicts are regarded as catalysts for development in multi-ethnic societies, the paper therefore recommends the teaching of multicultural education in the Nigerian schools through cultural exchange programmes, inter-religious and inter-ethnic dialogues.

Introduction

Multiculturalism is a body of thought in political philosophy about the proper way to respond to ethnic, cultural and religious diversities. Mere tolerance of group differences is said to fall short of treating members of minority groups as equal citizen since recognition and positive accommodation of group differences are required through "group-differentiated rights" (Kymlicka, 1995). While multiculturalism has been used as an umbrella term to characterize the moral and political claims of a wide range of disadvantaged groups including African-American, women, gays and lesbians, and the disabled; most theories of multiculturalism tend to focus their arguments on immigrants who are ethnic and religious minorities (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2010).

Theoretically and empirically, the pluralism of a state predisposes its members towards conflicts (Otite, 2000). Since resources are always limited and scarce, the contests between socio-cultural segments under various leaders are inevitable. Violence is therefore generated over resources. This is why ethno-religious violence are endemic in multi-ethnic societies such as Nigeria. Basically, ethnic and religious crises are ill-winds which blow nobody any good. In most cases, many of the religious violence often ended up with ethnic colouration and vice versa. However, Akintoye (1976) maintained that there is no gainsaying the fact that colonialism promoted and intensified ethnic feelings among the diverse groups and communities working against national integration in Nigeria. Thus, the ultimate aim of this paper is to explore the valuable role of multicultural education towards curbing ethno-religious violence in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarifications

Ethnicity is the contextual discrimination by members of one group against others on the basis of differentiated system of socio-cultural systems (Cohen 1969, Otite 1975, 2000). It is a conflictual behavioural disposition to or relationship existing between members of two or more tribes in a polity. Thus, ethno-religious violence arises from a combination or mixture of ethnocentrism and conflictual interaction amongst more than one tribe or religious group within a polity

(Abii-Ndoh, 1998). Inter and intra-ethnic and religious conflicts have continued unabated for fairly a long time in Nigeria. Also religious crises often occur within (intra) the same identical religion and beliefs. Examples were the Maitatsine religious crises against other muslims in Kano in 1980 and the Boko Haram incessant violence. Within the Christians, a clash between the God's Kingdom Society (GKS) and the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star (BCS) sometimes ago in Calabar was narrowly averted by the intervention of the law enforcement agencies (Fadeiye, 2005).

However, multiculturalism and pluralism come from the same source (liberal-political and educational theories) but they lead in different directions and represent distinct social visions. Multiculturalism values cultural differences and ethnicity, and seeks to maintain them in ways that are not solely dependent on the monetary interests of individuals (Feinberg, 2011). Indeed, one concern of multiculturalist theory is access to dominant, hegemonic and unchallenged cultural forms which may work to the disadvantage of local cultural affiliation. Accordingly, Wikipedia (2011a) describes multiculturalism as the appreciation, acceptance or promotion of multiple cultures, applied to the demographic make-up of a specific place. In a political context, the term is used for a range of meanings, ranging from the advocacy of equal respect to the various cultures in a society, to a policy of promoting the maintenance of cultural diversity and policies in which people of various ethnic and religious groups are addressed by the authorities as defined by the group they belong to. Thus, a common aspect of many such policies is that they avoid presenting any specific ethnic, religious, or cultural community's values as central (Wikipedia, 2011a).

The Commonwealth Government, according to the Media (2011), has identified three dimensions of multicultural policy:

- cultural identity: The right of all citizens, which carefully defined limits to express and share their individual cultural heritage, including their language and religion;
- social justice: The right of all citizens to equality of treatment and opportunity, and the removal of barriers of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, language, gender or place of birth ; and

- economic efficiency: The need to maintain, develop and utilize effectively the skills and talents of all citizens, regardless of background (P.1).

However, multicultural education is a field of study and an emerging discipline whose major aim is to create equal educational opportunities for students from diverse, racial, ethnic, religious, social-class and cultural groups. Put cogently, Banks and Banks (1995) viewed multicultural education as a field of study designed to increase educational equity for all students that incorporates, for this purpose, content, concepts, principles, theories and paradigms from history, the social and behavioural sciences, and particularly from ethnic studies and women studies.

The Goals of and Justifications for Multicultural Education

Multicultural education is seen by its supporters as a fairer system that allows people to truly express who they are within a society, that is more tolerant and adaptable to social issues (Wikipedia, 2011b). They argue that culture is not one definable thing based on one race or religion, but rather the result of multiple factors that change as the world changes.

Research by Bennett (1995) in the United States of America has indicated that ethnic minority students are disproportionately poor, dropping out of school, being suspended or expelled and achieving far below their potentials relative to the ethnic majority. Consequently, teachers must prepare themselves and their children for the ever changing challenges of interacting and communicating with diverse races. Reduction of fear, and ignoring personal detachment are possible benefits to a multicultural education (Keith, 2011).

One of the important goals of multicultural education is to help all students to acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to function effectively in a pluralistic democratic society and to interact, negotiate and communicate with people from diverse groups in order to create a civic and moral community that works for the common good (Banks and Banks, 1995).

However, Feinberg (2011) identify three goals of multicultural

education as, (1) providing students with information about the diversity within their own society; (2) encouraging respect for the practices of other cultural groups; and (3) helping students from disadvantaged minorities develop pride in their own cultural heritage. Thus, any multicultural education in any liberal society may address cultural pride, cultural respect and cultural information. (Standford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2010) examines three justifications for multicultural education from the following view points:

Communitarian view: One justification for multicultural education arises out of the communitarian critique of liberalism. Liberals are ethical individualists who insist that individuals should be free to choose and pursue their own conceptions of the good life. Communitarians embrace ontological holism, which views social goods as “irreducibly social” (Taylor, 1995). This holistic view of collective identities and cultures underlies Charles Taylor’s normative case for a multicultural politics of recognition. Thus, diverse cultural identities and languages are irreducibly social goods, which should be presumed to be of equal worth.

Liberal Egalitarian view: A second justification for multicultural education comes from within liberalism. Kymlicka (1995) develops the most influential theory of multiculturalism based on the liberal values of autonomy and equality. Culture is said to be instrumentally valuable to individuals, for two reasons. First, it enables individual autonomy with regards to having an adequate range of options from which to choose. Second, culture is instrumentally valuable for individual self-respect.

Postcolonial view: Some philosophers have looked beyond liberalism in arguing for multicultural education. A postcolonial perspective seeks to develop models of constitutional and political dialogue that recognize culturally distinct ways of speaking and acting. According to this view point, multicultural societies consist of diverse ethno-religious, and moral outlooks. If liberal societies are to take such diversity seriously, they must recognize that liberalism is just one of many substantive outlooks based on a specific view of man and society (Standford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2010).

What should real Multicultural Education look like?

Multicultural education relates to education and instruction designed for cultures of several different races in an educational system. This approach to teaching and learning is based upon consensus building, respect and fostering cultural pluralism within racial societies. Multicultural education acknowledges and incorporates positive racial/ethnic idiosyncrasies into classroom atmospheres (Keith, 2011).

Accordingly, Bennett (1995) and Keith (2011) submit that multicultural education must have, as its crux, some defining characteristics to achieve its purpose for students, teachers, parents and administrators of the school system. These include; (a) a learning environment that supports positive interracial/inter-ethnic contact; (b) a multicultural curriculum; (c) positive teacher expectations; (d) administrative support; and (e) teacher training workshops. If one of the features is absent, frustration and heightened resentment may occur as backlash behaviour multiplies.

The effects of a positive multicultural climate may manifest in a number of ways, such as; (a) diminished pockets of segregation among student body; (b) less racial/ethnic tension in the schools; (c) increased ethnic minority retention and classroom performance; and (d) inclusion of a multicultural curriculum. In short, the multicultural educational environment should not be a microcosm of our present society, with regard to issues of diversity and tolerance. Most but all the features as outlined above may be important indications of success.

Ethno-religious Violence in Nigeria at a Glance

Ethnicity and religious crises have been twin obstacles in Nigeria's search for political stability. Thus, the timeline of religious and ethnic violence in Nigeria in the last ten years according to the Next Online Newspaper (2011) could be catalogued as follows:

Table 1: Catalogue of Ethno-Religious Violence in Nigeria

Source: Adapted from the Next Online Newspaper (2011).

In specific terms the causes of ethno-religious crises in Nigeria are neo-colonial socio-economic scarcity and inequality, absence of national

consciousness, internalization of ethnic sentiments, the use of ethnic base for political competition, the use of regional or state government apparatus for ethnic or religious competitions and differences in the traditional ways of life. Others are political, religious, social, economic policy differences which run along communal lines and the emergence

Year	Location	Principal Source	Remark or Casualties
2000	Northern Nigeria	Opposition to the introduction of Islamic Sharia Law	Thousands killed and properties destroyed
September, 2001	Jos, Plateau State	Christian – Muslim violence, starts after muslim prayers	Over 1,000 people were killed
November, 2002	Kaduna	Articles of a newspaper considered blasphemous to the Islamic faith during the Miss World contest in Abuja	At least 216 lives were lost
May, 2004	Yelwa, Plateau State	Street battles by muslim Fulani and Christian militia	630 people were killed
February, 2006	Maiduguri	Muslim protest against Danish cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed resulting in muslim and Christian mobs	At least 157 people died in a week of rioting
November, 2008	Jos, Plateau State	Disputed local government election triggering clashes between muslim and Christian gangs	At least 700 people were killed
February 21, 2009	Bauchi	Religious tensions	At least 11 people died, churches and mosques were burnt down
July, 2009	Bauchi	Boko Haram's dem and the adoption of Shariah in Northern Nigeria. The Boko Haram suicide bombing still ongoing till date	More than 1000 people are killed and over 500 arrested
July 27, 2009	Maiduguri	Security forces killing of sect members	90 people were killed
July 29, 2009	Yobe State	Gun battle near the town of Potiskum by religious tensions	At least 33 sect members were killed

December, 2009	Bauchi	Clashes between security forces and members of an Islamic sect armed with machetes	At least 40 people were killed
January, 2010	Jos, Plateau State	Clashes between muslim and Christian gangs	More than 400 people were killed
March, 2010	DogoNawa, Zoland Plateau Southern Jos, Plateau State	Clashes between Islamic pastoralists and Christian villagers in mostly Christian villages	More than 300 people died
December 24, 2010	Jos, Plateau State	Bombings by muslim and Christian youth	At least 80 people were killed

of a section of the population which benefits from the allocation of resources along ethnic or religious lines (Dung, Rikaya & Danazumi, 1998; Otite, 2000). Ekwealor (1997) however identifies ethno-religious tolerance as the major recipe for ethno-religious crises lies embarked upon by Nigeria citizens. According to Ekwealor, Nigerians have to see themselves as creatures of the same unified God, unto whom everyone shall return and be accountable. This opinion thus emphasizes the need to de-ethnicise and distribute federal amenities equitably and recognise of merits in appointments and admissions. This is also suggesting the learning content the multicultural education curriculum.

In the opinion of Hilliard and Pine (1990), a key factor in any proposed multicultural education is curriculum development; and thus, a multicultural curriculum should be considered because it: (a) provides alternative points of view relative to information already taught in most educational systems; (b) provides ethnic minorities with a sense of being inclusive in history, science, etc. and; (c) can decrease stereotypes, prejudice, bigotry, and ethnocentrism in Nigeria and the world. In other word, political re-orientation which is geared towards selflessness should be emphasized in the curriculum. Keith (2011) has a opinions similar to this. According to Keith, by its nature, a multi-ethnic society is characterized by multiculturalism; and that the perception of disregard for the culture of other ethnic groups or its perceived pollution has a chance of leading to ethnic conflicts. Thus,

with integrated multicultural education curriculum, social activities, administrative support and staff training, fear, ignorance, and personal detachment may be notably reduced in both students and teachers. Multicultural education should therefore be seen to be capable of eliminating the crux of stereotyping, prejudice, racism/ethnicity, and bigotry.

Its learning content should therefore emphasize peaceful conflict resolution, honest and capable leadership, good governance to reduce the level of unemployment, poverty, oppression, domination and marginalization, and raise the standards of living of all Nigerians; and apart from direct classroom instruction, public enlightenment campaigns should be carried out on the need for people to tolerate one another, respect other people's views, have peaceful co-existence and consider dialogue rather than armed confrontation. People are also to be encouraged to examine the aftermath of ethnic and religious crises, which had resorted to warfare in countries like Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Sudan, Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi, Ireland, India and Lebanon (Fadeiye, 2005).

Conclusion

This paper has examined the imperativeness of multicultural education in Nigerian schools. It observed that the traditional culture of the people has a very significant impression on the Nigerian social life. It thus recognises multicultural education as an effective tool towards addressing the issues and that can correct some of the ills of ethno-religious differences and their attendant problems on the Nigerian society.

References

- Abii-Ndoh, P. (1998). Ethnicity in Nigeria: A critical appraisal of the role of the Nigerian military governments. Paper presented at the conference of NAPSASS, Federal College of Education, Abeokuta.
- Adeoye, S. (2000). Government may deploy troops to Ife, Modakeke. *The Guardian*, March 21, p. 1.
- Ajibade, A. (2000). Ife, Modakeke – fighters chase out anti-riot policemen. *Nigerian Tribune*, May 10, p. 1.
- Akintoye, S.A. (1976). *Emergent Africa states*. London: Longman group

Ltd.

- Angaye, G. (2011). Causes and cures of conflicts in Nigeria. Retrieved from www.nigerdeltacongress.com/causes_and_cures_of_conflicts_in.htm on 24th August, 2011.
- Banks, O. and Banks, W. (1995). Multicultural education. Retrieved from www.ncrd.org/sdrs/areas/issues/educators/presrvce/pe31kl.htm on August 24, 2011.
- Bennett, C. (1995). Comprehensive multicultural education. theory and practice (3rd Ed). Massachusetts: Allen & Bacon.
- Cohen, A. (1969). Custom and politics in urban Africa. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Dung, C.J., Rikaya, B.P. & Danazui, B. (1998). Ethnicity and national stability in Nigeria. Paper presented at the conference of NAPSASS, Federal College of Education, Abeokuta.
- Ekwealor, C.C. (1997). The problems of ethnicity in Nigeria democracy: An historical perspective. Arts and social sciences forum journal. 2(1), 81 – 84.
- Fadeyiye, J.O. (2005). A Social Studies textbook for colleges and universities (Part one). Ibadan: Akin-Johnson press & publishers.
- Feinberg, W. (2011). The goals of multicultural education: a critical re-evaluation. Retrieved from www.ed.uiuc.edu/eps/PES-Yearbook/96_docs/feinberg.html on August 24, 2011.
- Hilliard, A. & Pine, G. (1990). Rx for racism: imperatives for American's schools. Phi Delta: Kappan Press.
- Keith, W. (2011). Multicultural education. Retrieved from <http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/papers/keigh.html> on September 10, 2011.
- Kymlicka, W. (1995). The rights of minority cultures. Oxford: Oxford university press.
- Media (2011). National agenda for a multicultural Australia. Retrieved from www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/multicultural/.../whatismu.ht on September 10, 2011.
- Next Online Newspaper (2011). Timeline of religious and ethnic

violence in Nigeria. . Retrieved from http://234next.com/csp/cms/sites/Next/Home/5659998-146/timeline_of_religious_and_ethnic_violence.csp on September 10, 2011.

Otite, O. (1975). Resource competition and inter-ethnic relations in Nigeria. In Leo Despress (Ed), *Ethnicity and resource competition in plural societies*. The Hague: Mouton Press.

Otite, O. (2000). *Ethnic pluralism, ethnicity and ethnic conflicts in Nigeria*, Ibadan: Shaneson C.I. limited.

Standford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2010). Multiculturalism. Retrieved from www.plato.stanford.edu/entries/multiculturalism on September 10, 2011.

Taylor, C. (1995). *Irreducibly social goods. Philosophical arguments*. Cambridge MA: Harvard university press.

Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia (2011a). Multiculturalism. Retrieved from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/multiculturalism> on September 10, 2011.

Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia (2011b). Multicultural Education. Retrieved from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/multicultural-education> on August 24, 2011.