

Education in a Democratic and Multi-Cultural Nigerian State: An Assessment

Lucky Nziadam

PhD, Department of Education Foundations Faculty of Education, University of Port Harcourt

ANNOTATION: This work highlights a multicultural approach to ethical issues in schools, as a Nigerian in his heterogeneous nature and democratic tenets will stand a better position to fight ethnocentrism and racism that often result from ignorance of other peoples and culture. The essence of multicultural education can be seen from the perspective of cultural tolerance and complementarily. By a way of recommendation, the paper made a strong moral case for inclusive disclosure of different ethical viewpoints of different cultures in Nigeria as a democratic society. Such an approach fosters respect for the values and beliefs of other people and respect is generally accepted by most culture as a moral value. All these should be reflected in the school.

KEY WORDS: Education, Nigerian, Multi-Cultural.

Introduction

Education in this paper is seen as a political tool for social renewal in multicultural society like Nigeria. It is a vehicle “for the preservation of the lives of its members and maintenance of its social structure” (Falaiye, 2011). Education is without doubt the key to nation building, modernization and sustainable development. It is such a powerful tool of national purpose that Brenibeck in (Falaiye2011:) asserts that “ there is no magic in education, except as we give it magic. Education can heal or kill, buildup or tear apart, life or deprive. It is an instrument that can be used for good or evil. It is advisable to always use it well.

Most people are of the erroneous impression that the main task of education is to prepare us for paid employment. This is as a result of the material benefits derivable from it. As Socrates, Plato and their peers did at the Agora, education is to challenge the mind to find the truth, seek knowledge because in the view of both philosophers “knowledge is virtue”. Education is knowledge seeking, sometimes it is knowledge for the sake of knowledge. Hence William (2011:17) argued that the crisis of Africa is not just political, economic or spiritual, it is also an epistemological crisis. An epistemological crisis flows from it. It is a crisis of cognition and perception. An epistemological crisis is a crisis of diagnostic inexactitude. You cannot diagnose or cure what you don’t know.

From the foregoing, it is very proper that philosopher of education see it as a major duty to ensure that education is channeled towards a good use. Education should be problem- solving. After independence, it was to education we turned for the healing of African wound inflicted upon us through the instrumentalities. Unfortunately, since then, the fortune of the continent has not improved as expected. Pathetically, Africa still plays a subordinated role in a west- centered world; her capacity

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for self-determination has dwindled. Education as a powerful instrument has the ability to “build up” for social reconstruction and mental liberation in these African States such as Nigeria.

Furthermore, man is in a better position to create the type of society he lives in. That is what is referred to as “Reconstructionism”. Reconstructionism is not alien to philosophy; it can be traced back to Plato’s endeavour to establish in his Republic a just and better organized society through education. Like Plato, we admit that efforts to achieve social reconstruction may not be violent, not revolutionary but it should be evolutionary, forward looking and futuristic. For Fanon, however, this process should be violent. According to him; true liberation can only come through violent and bloodshed. Who is right, Plato or Fanon?

To solve these problems at stake, let us look at some key words in the paper with a view to bringing out their implication for our development.

Democracy in a Multi-Cultural Society

Democracy as we know is a kind of political and government arrangement that derives its mandate, legitimacy and authority from the majority of the people. In one simple language, democracy is the rule of the majority. It is said that it originated from ancient Greek city states. However, there are recorded political literatures that many Nigerian societies, especially in the south-East, a kind of political arrangement was in existence long before the Greek’s democracy, (Nwankwor 2010). Most of the literature on the process of democratization in Africa traced the problem of peaceful and orderliness to the twin problem of religion and ethnicity which are two major indices of cultural diversity in most African states and which have been responsible for the instability experienced in the politics of the continent (Makinda, Ukiwo, 2003). Ukiwo observed that two trends are discernible from the discourses on democratization and ethnic conflict. The first emphasizes the contribution of ethnicity while the second focuses on democratization. Without delving into the basic features of democracy and irrespective of its origin, democracy is an attitude of the mind, a commitment by a group of people to confer legitimacy on the body of persons as leaders through delegated representation.

Democracy is both a process and a concept. As a process, it derives its legitimacy and acceptance from the people. As a concept it represents the aggregate consent and opinion of the people in society. This consent and legitimacy is expressed by the people in an atmosphere devoid of rancor, hate and primordial sentiments. It is an embracing and thorough-going process of majority rules. As a culture in both Greek city states and some African states proved to be more accommodating than all other forms of government. Other Open culture through contact, internalized the core values of democracy and this stimulated a world- wide wave of democracy as the best form of government, anchored on the tenets of social contract. In Nigeria, all the thirty states including Abuja (FCT) are multi-cultural in nature and in orientation and deliberative democracy seem to be a good candidate for adjudicating and coping with conflicts that arise as a result of the diversities that exist in the democratic state.

Multiculturalism and Multicultural Society

Multicultural society, as the term suggests is a society that is constituted by people with diverse cultural orientation. The term is used to describe the cultural diversities that exist in a particular society. This is a society where a variety of diverse cultures coexist for common social, economic and political goal. The term culture can be expanded to include such human institution like language, religion, norms and rules of behaviour, beliefs and practices. However the term may also be expanded to include associations and social movements, which together constitute what in contemporary politics, is called civil society. On the other hand, the term multiculturalism is a

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contestable concept in the sense that the term has been used in a wide range of ways, to pick out a variety of ideas and practices. According to Bamikole (2008:8), many different forms of multiculturalism have been identified and defended or criticized by various authors. In view of these different meanings of the terms and the different forms it has taken in the literature, it is difficult to settle for a single conception. However, one way by which one can get into the heart of the meaning of multiculturalism is to examine how the term has been used in the literature and in the different states that have been described as multicultural states.

Siegel (1999:387-409) has drawn attention to two broad ways in which the terms “multiculturalism” is often used. The first is that which refers to the contemporary” educational reform movement that aims to equalize educational opportunities for diverse racial and ethnic groups which movement “incorporates the idea that all students- regardless of their gender and social class, and their ethnic, racial or cultural characteristics- should have an equal opportunity to learn in schools.

The second way by which the term has been used typically refers to the “ more general ideas that schools and people and institutions more generally should acknowledge value and respect cultural differences and the alternative experiences and perspectives to members of different cultures. In Nigeria, member of “Minority” cultures should not be required to assimilate into, nor to adopt the alien cultural commitment or identified of, nor be marginalized silenced or oppressed by, a dominant, hegemonic “majority” culture. The idea of given attention to three outstanding languages of Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo to the detriment of other “minority” languages should be discouraged.

Most of the works that have been done on multiculturalism have identified a moral tone behind it. The essence of this moral position is the idea of giving recognition to the autonomy of individuals or groups of individuals on the basis of the equality of persons without regard to race, creed, gender or social class. And because multiculturalism that respects cultural differences is in various ways morally superior to such monoculturalism. In stegel’s observation, Charles Taylor contribution on multiculturalism in his write-up. Examining the politics of recognition take for granted that multi-culturalism hinges its claim on moral grounds. (Siegel, 1999) Although the authors such as Charles Taylor Susan wolf and Amy Cutmann have different perceptions of the moral issues raised by the different elements which constitute multi-culturalism’s major concerns, they all agree that the issues raised by the circumstance to which multiculturalism is the response are primarily moral one, whether such issues arise within social, economic and political settings.

Dimensions of a Multicultural Society

From our discussion above, one may suggest that we have two broad dimensions to a multicultural society, the one that is based on culture (primordial affinity) and the other based on voluntary association which is consciously created in order to further specific goals. The first category talks about cultural diversity which is based on differences that are derived from culture. In this respect, Parekh (2000) has three forms which are prevalent in modern society.

The first, which he refers to as sub cultural diversity stands for members of a human group which although share a broadly common culture with the dormant group, some of them either entertain different beliefs and practices concerning particular areas of life or evolve relatively distinct ways of life of their own. Gays, Lesbians, those following unconventional lifestyles or family structures belong to the first category while miners, fishermen, jet-set transnational executives, artists belong of cultural diversity is that members broadly share their society’s dominant system of meaning and values and seek to carve out within its space for their divergent lifestyles. They do not represent an alternative culture but seek to pluralize the existing one.

The second category entails members of society that are highly critical of some of the central principles or values of the prevailing culture and seek to reconstitute them along appropriate lines. Examples of this category of cultural diversity are feminists who attack the dominant culture's ingrained patriarchal bias, religious people its secular orientation, and environmentalists its anthropocentric and technocratic bias. This category to Parekh in Bamikole (2008:10) is called perspectival diversity.

The third category of cultural diversity in modern society is the communal. This includes several self-conscious and more or less well-organized communities entertaining and living by their own different systems of beliefs and practices. They include newly arrived immigrants, various religious communities like the Rastafarians.

A corollary of the multicultural society is civil society. In contrast to the primordial affinity which exists among people that are different in cultural terms, civil society represents different members of the populations of a modern society that voluntarily come together to pursue common agenda for specific purposes. Walzer (1995:7) defines civil society as the space of uncoerced human association and also the set of relational networks formed for the sake of family, faith, interest and ideology that fill this space". The questions that arise with regards to Walzer's definition are: what fill this space called civil society? What kinds of activities take place there? And, what are the values that animate it? Walzer's answer to these questions begin with the concept of identity, as defined through different forms of membership in society, social class in Marxian terms, individuals that can associate freely, and social and political organization, charities, community groups, religious congregations and women's help groups.

The above views represent a general conception of multicultural state in the sense that the specified features are distinctive of such a state. But Kuper in Bamikole (2008:11) defined a multicultural state, but we think both can be used interchangeably in terms of particular societies which were colonized and in which the colonizers subjected most of the people to the domination of rulers of different race and culture. This view of a pluralist (Multicultural) society fits well the situation of most African state. In literature there are two models of a pluralist society; the equilibrium and the Conflict Model, the equilibrium model sees society as a combination of individuals, ethnic group, pressure groups but with some common commitment to the same goal. On the other hand, the conflict model derives from a forced Union of diverse groups of people, which have found themselves in situations where their difference are more pronounced than their commonalities and which therefore move along with one another. It is in context that one can understand Chief Obafemi Awolowo's View that Nigeria is not a nation but a mere geographical expression. The Late Awolowo was right if he meant that Nigeria is an example of a state where there are a lot of diverse groups of people with diverse interests which have not been properly welded into a nation, here Nigeria could be regarded as a multicultural society which operates on the conflict model.

The next question that will engage our attention is given the type of democracy that has been bequeathed to African states, first by their colonial masters, second by their first generation leaders and third, by their military institutions, how have these states fared in the attempt to create a nation that will accommodate all the diverse groups that make up African societies?. What is however clear is that given the present situations in most African states, different groups have always suggested that those attempts have not really worked.

However, attempt will be made to use Rawls' idea of public reason in the challenges of multi-cultural states and also the role of education in the resolution of the conflict model.

Rawls' idea of Public Reason and the Challenges of Multicultural State

Before we discuss Rawls suggested solution to the problem of conflicts in a constitutional democracy there is the need to recognize how democratic societies typically deal with the problem emanating from multicultural society especially its conflict model. The first way is to pretend that all things are well and some of the problems are just handiwork of “extremists”, “disgruntled element” and” those who do not wish the state well” and this logically leads to the second, which is the attempt by the state to eliminate the problem through fiat, either by legislating or through coercive application of state power. Many African regimes are replete with these two ways of addressing the conflict question. The third way is to recognize the facts of diversity and deal with it through civic and civil way like discussion, dialogues and negotiations. Rawls, position falls into the third of these ways.

The seed of Rawls notion of the idea of public reason as he discussed it in political liberalism and the law of people has been sown in A Theory of Justice. In the first chapter of A Theory of Justice, Rawls affirms that: “Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought laws and institutions no matter how efficient and well-arranged must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust.” For Rawls, justice is fairness and it consists of two principles: the principle of liberty and the principle of difference. According to the first principle, each member of a society has an equal claim to the most extensive equal liberties compatible with similar liberty for all. The second principles assert that the only morally acceptable inequalities are those which would be to the advantage of the least advantaged stratum in the society. To the extent that these basic principles are realized in it and are religiously observed, society is a just one. The concept of justice is developed by Rawls along notion of well-ordered society in political liberalism. For Rawls, a well- ordered is a society effectively regulate by a public political conception of justice. To say that a society is well-ordered conveys three things. (i) It is a society in which everyone accepts, and knows that everyone else accepts, the very same principles of justice (ii) Its basic structure- that is its main political and social institutions and how they fit together as one system of cooperation- is publicly known, or with good reason believed, to satisfy those principles, and (iii) Its citizens have a normally effective sense of justice and so they generally comply with society’s basic institutions, which they regard as just.

Rawls’ belief is that his conception of justice coupled with his notion of a well- ordered society are capable of providing an Archimedean fulcrum on which all members of a multicultural society can predicate a shared good and which can therefore be used as stating point of discussions about their differences on the basis of the fact that all members are free and equal. It is on the basis of this connection that Rawls introduced his three principals of political liberalism and how it understands the ideal of constitutional democracy. The first of these principles is that the basic structure of society is regulated by a political conception of justice; the second that this political conception is the focus of an overlapping consensus of reasonable comprehensive doctrines and third that public discussion, when constitutional essentials and questions of basic justice are at stake, is conducted in terms of the political conception of justice.

The question that will be asked then is whether the Rawlsian programme is applicable to the type of multicultural and democratic state of Africa. Menkithi cited by Bamikole (2008:12) has suggested that Rawlsian liberalism, or at least a certain aspect of it is well suited to the need of our times because” it can, without exaggeration, be said that one thing that most strikingly marks world today is the fact of conflict borne of perceptual pluralism and a de-countering of knowledge, both within and across cultures”.

There are critics of Rawlsian idea of multicultural as a result of the language of individualism. His view of individualism hinges on Kant’s doctrine of autonomy, in which individuals are moral

legislators who obey the laws which they themselves have legislated. The problem here is that this view will not work in a society which operates on communal ideology like most (traditional) African societies. Parekh also argued that Rawls' position is inhospitable to cultural diversity. This is because it does not take into consideration the cultural aspirations of such communities as the indigenous people, national minorities, sub national groups, and the immigrants. What is common to these group of people is that they seek cultural autonomy in one form or the other and hence some departures from the conventional liberal occupation with a homogeneous legal and political structures. Finally, if we focus on contemporary societies all over the world, it would appear that those groups and movements who would label as "unreasonable pluralism constitute the bulk of those who are challenges posed by these groups of people requires a philosophy that is totally different from the liberal individualist doctrine of political liberalism. The point that is being made here is especially relevant to the African situation, in which nowadays, African peoples have been disorientated through many years of colonialism and bad government which have resulted in the absence of a common nexus of interest which bind them together as the same people. The point then is that most of the assumption behind Rawls programme would not seem to work for most African countries, given the historical and the cultural orientation of the continent.

Education in Democratic and Multicultural Nigerian Society:

A philosophical appraisal of Education as a concept is all embracing and comprehensive. But the paper will limit it to schooling. John Dewey in his general perspective shrewdly analyzed the "cultural quality" problem in schooling by distinguishing four special functions of a school within a complex (multicultural) society. The first function is to provide a simplified environment, one in which the complex life around the student is broken into fairly fundamental and manageable portions. These are presented in a way that permits interaction by the student in a manner appropriate to the person's stage of cognitive- affective development. They are progressively ordered to move from the simpler. Already at this elementary level, selections are being made so that the student's learning is not haphazard affairs-multi-cultural objectives are called for, moreover, not just because it is complex throughout. Criteria are also suggested at this level that forms a pattern for such objectives.

The second function of the school for Dewey is to serve as the chief agency of the society for selecting the best, irrespective of divides especially what will make for better further society. These things are reinforced; what is relatively undesirable is excluded, so as to establish a purified social medium for action.

Dewey's third function of a school within a complex society is to provide some balance among the various elements that exist within the social environment, so that each individual can escape from the limitations of a more narrow inherited environment, can fruitfully mingle with people of other backgrounds and can unite with them in activity towards common aims. In this respect, multi-cultural objectives would not support bland assimilation, a uniformity that lacks respect for differences of belief custom and identify and does not know what to do with those differences. Nor would it support strict separation, in which individuals are encouraged to form factions and to reside there without any regard for alternative ways of life.

A fourth function is to enable the individuals to coordinate the diverse influences of the many social environments they may enter, a steady and integrating experience that brings the simplifying, selecting and balancing functions to fulfillment. In setting multicultural objectives with all these basic functions of schooling in mind, it is important to recall Dewey's depiction of a social environment as consisting of all "the activities of fellow beings that are bound up in the carrying out of the activities of any one of its members."

These functions and the several types of criteria for setting multicultural objectives would appear to be indispensable if there is to be a creatively intelligent approach to multi-cultural education in the schools. Clearly, the recommended process move far away from the timeworn plea for assimilation- this only ends in uniformity and elitism. As Dewey (1966:20-22) himself well know, in a more open and democratic society the surprises, the blending, the new encounters are just as important as the more settle elements. Multi-cultural education in such a setting must foster these things and must provide means for their critical assessment.

Having discussed the specific roles of school as an outstanding aspect of education as a concept, it would be necessary to discuss Nigeria's diversity with beautiful cultures which has been envied for its culture richness, its variety in cuisine and dish, her people's colourful apparel alongside their tasty traditions, dance, primitive societal structure, and religion etc. The ethnicity of Nigeria is so varied that there is no universal definition of a Nigeria beyond that of someone who lives within the borders of the country, Nigeria. About three hundred ethnic groups comprise the population of Nigeria. The three largest and most dominant ethnic groups are the Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo. Other smaller groups include the Fulani, Ijaw, Kanuri, Ibibio, Tiv, Ogoni and Edo. Prior to their conquest by Europeans, these ethnic groups have separate and independent histories. Their grouping together into a single entity known as Nigeria was a construct of their British Colonizers, drawn to serve commercial interest, largely without regard for the territorial claims of the indigenous people. These various ethnic groups never considered themselves part of the same culture. This general lack of Nigerian nationalism coupled with an ever-changing and often ethnically biased national leadership, have led to sever internal ethnic conflict and a civil war. The civil war of 1967-70, is a typical example of such conflicts. Ethnic sentiment has been one of the factors responsible of most of the inefficiencies and low productivity in Nigeria. Presently, there are a lot of abnormality in the neither system ranging from nor regard for parents, teachers, elders and leaders when cultist, kidnappers, robbers, fraudsters, rapists, murderers and other criminal are let loose and respected. Sometimes they are recommended and given leadership position at the local, state and national levels. Corruption in virtually every sector of the country and most Nigerians would unflinchingly agree that corruption begets the plethora of problems the country face today.

As in other liberal democratic nations around the world, Nigeria since independence irrespective of their diversities have been living together, but greater efforts is expected from them. Plato in **The Republic** proposed the kind of education that would help bring about a world in which man and society are moved as they are capable of moving towards the good. To Aristotle, happiness, the chief good of life is dependent upon a virtuous and well- ordered soul that can only come about as one develops habits of virtue that are shaped through the proper kind of education.

John Dewey as an educational philosopher asserts that sustainable growth in society can be attained in diversity. As it is happening in Nigeria today, if a given community elects to reward only a small number of functions produced by a selected segment of the population that community is to be condemned. According to Dewey (1992) in Boylston, the key to survival is diversity, not homogeneity. While he acknowledges individual difference and inequality in physical and cognitive performance of various tasks, he also argued that a democratic community is primarily concerned with moral equality. From this perspective, the initial aim of education is to aid all to achieve their unique potential and to make their unique contribution to society. Dewey goes to declare that through creative inquiry the world can be transformed. Also to Dewey, diversity provides alternatives, whereas Isolationism reduces freedom because it reduces the capacity to think of alternate possible choices and actions. In this interpretation of freedom, creativity, dialogue and pluralistic democracy are optimal ways for sustaining growth in society (Dewey, 1916).

In the national goals of Nigeria, these following are spelt out.

- The inculcation of national consciousness and national unity.
- The inculcation of the right type of values and articles for the survival and the Nigerian society.
- The taming of the mind in the understanding of the world around and
- The acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competence as equipment for the individuals to live in and contribute to the development of the society.

The national policy on education naturally enough, contains normative phrases prescribing the direction in which the children are to be influenced. In these educational institutions, children of different genders, ethnicity and social class meet for one purpose which is education. The schools are important arena of socialization, where the term “socialization” refers to the process by which a child develops into a unique individual at the same time, as he becomes part of the society and the culture. Since the influence of values and attitudes in the broadest sense represents a key element of the socialization that goes on within both the family and the school, the implicit assumption is that the set of values and attitudes that are instilled in the children is generally considered to apply for society. With the cooperation and understanding of the home, the offered in the schools and training establishments open doors to the world and the future, and gives pupils and apprentices historical and cultural insight and grounding.

An education that is inevitably influenced by different cultural factors, including religious and philosophical affiliation and related perceptions of reality, views of humanity, and values, irrespective of the background of the children give rise to a challenge, because how is education supposed to socialize the children into the society and also influence them culturally, when the parents’ wishes for their children are so diffuse due to their respective cultural and religious backgrounds? The solution lies in drawing a distinction between what types of difference can be tolerated by wider society and what should be clamped down on by means of argumentation and shrewdness and if necessary, by forcible means.

Conclusion

There is hardly any society in the world that is purely homogenous in the sense that it is made up of the same kind of people having the same cultural, religious, political and moral orientations. Nigeria as one of these societies is marked by diversity in one form or another. It is a social fact that diversity gives room to conflict and therefore, conflict remains a fact of social life, as a democratic state with amalgamation of different interests and ideologies. Besides the tensions that result from such differences, there is also the problem of how particular societies have been constituted especially by outside influence, which has led to different kinds of conflict situations among different members of the Nigerian society. However, be that as it may, the way in which the democratic nature of Nigeria manages conflicts makes a difference between peace and war. However the way in which those persons that are put in the position of authority interpret and manipulate the rules and norms have given rise to situations where some members of the society are marginalized, oppressed and discriminated against. In some cases, this situation has given rise to conflicts in the democratic state. Like Nigeria. With respect to the African situation, the fact of colonialism has dislocated the Nigerian state and it has also disorientated the African people from their erstwhile traditional values and cultures. This problem has been manifested especially in how African States are governed and how disagreements and conflicts among their members are resolved. This kind of democracy that has been transplanted to the African continent by the colonial masters and their African agents is alien to their

traditional beliefs and practices. Liberal democracy is based on the liberal notion of individualism and the (Western) democratic deal of majority rule. Individualism is against the African belief in community while majority rule is antithetical to the African belief in mass participation of the people in governance and decision making, especially in the educational sector.

Recommendations

We should realize that even the best laws, policies and programs, though sanctioned by every citizen take the day unless the youths are trained habitually in proper moral education. We need a type of moral education that will develop our potentials and the same time enriches us with new stock of knowledge. Only a moral education can build our nation towards posterity. Moral education must be nurture and foster the spirit of patriotism, pride for our nation, loyalty and love for our country.

Embedded within the structure of the democratic state, are various means of resolving conflicts. These range from such civil actions like negotiation, compromise, dialogue, strikes, demonstrations, whether peaceful or violent. This should be a lesson to be learnt especially from the angle of academic staff of Nigerian universities (ASUU) and federal government in Nigeria in the resolution of their matter instead of allowing strikes to the center stage.

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