

CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION: THE ROLE OF TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN THE PROMOTION OF PEACE IN NIGERIA

FATIMAH MOHAMMED PALMER (PhD)

Department of Fine and Applied Arts

University Of Benin

Benin City, Edo State

Nigeria.

fmpalmer2256@gmail.com

Abstract

Nigeria became a political unit as a result of the British amalgamation of 1914. Prior to this period, there had been a relatively high degree of cultural integration among the various peoples of the country. However, shortly before political independence to date, Nigeria has been plagued with intolerance between ethnic and religious groups which has led to mistrust, dissensions and insecurity as a result of cultural differences in the country. Besides this disturbing trend, observations reveal a great departure from the traditional values of positive and inter-dependent relationship to various forms of inhumanity to one another. This paper takes a critical look at the role of higher institutions in cultural transmission and development of positive value-orientation with particular reference to Nigeria's institutions of tertiary education. Suggestions are therefore proffered on how to infuse a more effective and realistic value-orientation into the nation's educational system for peaceful co-existence, societal development and sustainability.

Keywords: Cultural differences; National integration; Peace, Education; Tertiary institutions, Nigeria

Introduction

In the past five decades, education has occupied an increasing central position in Nigeria's development plans. The introduction of the Universal Primary Education in 1976 and the 6-3-3-4 system of education in 1982 and the Universal Basic Education in the year 1999 are manifestation of the governments' realization that education is an effective, weapon for social change. These education schemes confirm claims by educators, sociologists and organizations that education can promote national integration in a plural society (UNESCO, 1995; Blackenmore, 1980; Peil, 1982). While reviewing the plural nature of Nigerian society, the National Policy on Education (1985) strongly emphasizes the inculcation of national consciousness, national unity and the right type of values which are believed will ensure the survival of the nation. Since learners are part of a wider society, they are meant to be fully integrated into the society's culture with a view to preserving and transmitting same. As Mokwunye (1978) rightly opines, children all over the world are born into a culture which plays a significant role in their development. Therefore, students at any level of education have various cultural backgrounds. Such various cultural differences have in a way led to sporadic subtle and sometimes violent clashes among the various peoples of Nigeria.

This paper is of the view that the reality of cultural differences should not be used for divisive purposes. Rather, they should be utilized for the promotion of positive value-orientation which will enhance peaceful co-existence among Nigerians. The Cultural Policy of Nigeria (1988) enunciates that the state shall ensure at all levels of education, a curriculum featuring aspects of education which will enhance the common heritage of Nigerians as brothers and fellow citizens with a common destiny. It also states that at the university level, the state shall give emphasis to cultural researches, whether these have been achieved is debatable considering the ethnic cum religious intolerances in the country.

Concept of Culture and Values

Culture is part of man and has been with man from the beginning. It is developed and reassessed from generation to the next, thus culture may have the ability to change according to the dictates of a people. Lederach (1995) professed that 'culture is the shared knowledge and schemes created by a set of people for perceiving, expressing and responding to the social realities around them. Of course, social realities are dictated by societal changes, implying that culture is non-static. Soyinka (2016) is also of the opinion that culture is dynamic, and thus, no one proposes a permanent state of cultural beliefs and practices. However, culture itself is an amalgam of social practices, including ethical abstraction. Ethics according to Soyinka (2016) 'also advance with humanity's improved knowledge of the world and of humanity itself' and it is this 'improved knowledge' provided by higher institutions that is expected to promote understanding and respect towards one another in a multicultural society resulting in religious and social tolerance. Culture is not static, it is an active process, and it accumulates and becomes diffused through increasing contact with other societies. The society itself has never been static and the culture of the society changes as the society changes. Culture therefore is not merely transmitted, it is made. It is not simply historical and related to the past, but functional and vitally concerned with the present. As people live together in society they develop from their life experiences a set of rules and procedures which can enable them to live together in harmony. These set of rules and procedures embrace both the material and non-material aspects, together with supporting sets of ideas and values is called culture. Santagata (2002) asserts that culture is a capital asset accumulated by a community whose members refer to, to connote their identity.

Culture can be perceived as a general pattern of a particular group of people who organize their various activities like dancing, modes of dressing, greeting, religious beliefs, marriage institution and work orientation.

This paper simply defines culture as the total way of life of people, which are manifested in all their daily social and spiritual inclinations. Society provides the people who learn and practice culture, while culture sets the rules guiding the conduct of the people in the society. It therefore implies that for any change to

take place in the society, there must be a corresponding additional innovation in the culture. Development is driven by culture and it is itself a cultural process.

Values on the other hand represent reasons, beliefs, convictions or virtues that guide people's actions and their relationship with other members of the society. There is a distinction between the meaning of value in sociology from the meaning in economics or philosophy for instance. Social value forms an important part of the culture of the society and therefore has a role to play in the stabilization of social order. Values are what an individual, group or community holds to be right, reasonable and true, appropriate or desirable (Essen, 1977; Denga, 1983; Okon, 1984). Thus culture subsumes the concept of values since values are expressions of a society's culture. A multicultural society like Nigeria cherish some common values like honesty, loyalty, respect for elders, respect for other people's rights and properties while such vices as cruelty, lying, stealing, laziness, selfishness and other forms of inhuman behaviors are detested. Despite these common values in Nigeria, a high degree of cultural differences is noticeable and this prompted Peil (1982) to state that in Nigeria, there are a number of cultures and sub-cultures... differences in cultures in Nigeria are reflected in patterns of traditions, settlement, agriculture, religious beliefs, mode of dressing, as well as the numerous languages and dialects. These cultural differences have created some problems regarding what values should be taught or encouraged. The fundamental problem is the recurring threat to national unity over the years. Within the body politics, the diverse developments of religious and ethnic groups have given rise to a cancerous form of hatred, suspicion and fear of condemnation or marginalization, which culminate into the emergence of tribal/religious political parties, generating ill-feelings towards one another on the need for equality in leadership roles and governance.

Religious differences have also bred resentment, and even bloody clashes among adherents of the major religious groups. As well as differential attitude to social activities like amusement through entertainments, parties or dances. The diverse value orientations of the various cultural groups in Nigeria towards issues have led to some verbal and sometimes bloody clashes, even in the campuses of higher institutions. It is disheartening that this problem has become endemic in a country noted, for its secular stance.

There is also the problem of a national language. British colonization ushered in English as the official lingua franca. However, moves made at a time to evolve a national language generated a Salvador of attack and counter-attacks among members of the three dominant languages - Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. It was apparently in response to the need to resolve the crisis that the government has made it mandatory for secondary school students to study one of the three languages for the Secondary School Certificate Examination.

What can be inferred from the foregoing is that it is unsafe to impose a particular group's culture or to cast aspersions on another's culture. And that is why Cruz-Saco (2002) stated that the goal of promoting

social inclusion through actions that eliminate discrimination and other forms of intolerance and rejection is as important as the creation of economic opportunities. Cruz-Saco explained that social integration is the process of creating unity, inclusion and participation at all levels of society within the diversity of personal attributes so that every person is free to be the person he/she wants to be. To him, personal attributes include socio economic class, age, gender, sexual preference and expression, political ideas, ethnicity and cultural traits, religion, citizenship, and geographical region of origin and so on. The reverse is social exclusion, discrimination and rejection.....victims of such exclusion severally end up forming smaller and tightly connected networks of solidarity and support among themselves and their allies. This could be dangerous to society, as is evident in the Boko Haram insurgent group of north-east and the Niger-delta militancy groups plaguing the contemporary Nigerian society.

This constitutes the more reason why a distinction must be made between cognitive and affective aspects of culture. Cognitively, through education, culture aims at developing an awareness and appreciation of an individual's own culture, developing a clear understanding of other people's cultures, and developing a basic understanding of the differences between cultures. On the affective domain, culture aims at influencing the development of the individual through the promotion of social learning, through the teaching of social responsibility, the development of self-respect and the development of personal qualities. It is therefore important for people to learn to tolerate or accommodate others cultures and thoughts as this will subsequently develop positive and realistic value orientation. This is possible because people's reactions towards one another as a result of cultural differences are the outgrowth of their value-orientation.

One of the most important factors that could ensure the continuity of a society is the transmission of knowledge and values to its youth. A society rises or sinks in accordance with its values. If the society's values are capable of meeting the needs and aspirations of its members particularly the youth and are also able to resist negative outside intervention, the possibility of their survival is high. Conversely, the society is doomed to collapse if its values are opposed to the needs and aspirations of its members. It is in the light of this that educational institutions have an important role to play in transmitting the society's cultural values to the youth.

The Role of the School in Value-Orientation and Culture Transmission

The function of the school in cultural transmission as identified by Peil (1982) is to socialize the learners in shaping their values and attitudes to the needs of contemporary society; to broaden the mental horizons of learners and teach them new ways of looking at themselves and the society; to help the promotion of better understanding of societal traditions and for the development of local culture... and foster national integration through the inculcation of a common culture. Appreciation of the cultural arts and traditions

of one another despite diversity will play a paramount part in developing respect for others and create understanding of their ways of life.

Therefore, the school cannot be left out on matters bordering on ethics and morality. Since values can be taught and learnt, it is imperative that such universally desirable values like honesty, loyalty, self-control, industry, respect for other people's rights and properties should be taught in schools.

On the other hand, such undesirable values like selfishness, greed, corruption, armed robbery, kidnapping, drug pushing and peddling, smuggling, cheating and other social vices should be discouraged. The role of the school in developing positive value-orientation in contemporary Nigeria becomes more necessary in view of the incumbent danger posed by the numerous anti-social behaviors and insecurity. As Eyo (1989) rightly posits that Nigerians, particularly the youth have been hypnotized by the older generation to the extent that "no service, no duty, no pursuit can be undertaken in a natural, socially and morally clean manner in this country". Kolo (1991) laments that due to sheer negative citizenship ideals and values, Nigerians lay claim to patriotism but perpetrate acts of corruption, laziness, nonchalance, non-dedication and god-fatherism in their expected responsibilities to the country. The failure of programs such as the National Orientation Movement, the 1984 War Against Indiscipline and the 1986 MAMSER and others in promoting positive value-orientation further put much responsibility on the school in this direction.

Though the influence of the school in value-orientation and culture transmission is great in the primary and post-primary levels, it has now equally become more important at the tertiary level of education because these are the youths that are immediately absorbed into society and available to be recruited into marginalized groups especially in these times of unemployment and economic recession. At the tertiary level the National Policy on Education (1985) emphatically insists that a compulsory first year course in the social organization, customs, culture and history of various Nigerian peoples should be mounted. These courses are being variously referred to as citizenship education in colleges of education, land and peoples of Nigeria or nationalism in the universities. These courses aim exposing the students to such national integration oriented issues like early history of Nigeria, problems and prospects of cultural diversity, patriotism and obligations to the Nation.

It is, however, pertinent to state that experience and observation show the teaching of these courses at Nigeria's institutions of higher learning has not significantly altered the student's value orientation towards positive direction. The waves of student unrests, secret cults and other social vices in campuses can be partly traced to what Adedoye (1991) believes to be the unmet physical and psychological needs of the youth and which in most cases are the outcome of the society's cultural differences. At the national level, the nation's stability has often been threatened by competition for power, resources and jobs, thereby leading to corruption, religious bigotry, and ethnic/tribal politics.

Differential educational opportunities in higher institutions in various parts of the country have also been a threat to national integration. While a section of the country demands for its quota or other special privileges to increase its share of admission into higher institutions and corresponding top jobs, other areas emphasize academic qualifications.

As youngsters who are bubbling with energy, students at higher institutions are not unaware of these social, economic and political developments. By virtue of their exposure to the various social, economic and political theories and strategies, the students are always eager to demand for change which they believe will favour the masses. While some of such student actions are national in outlook, others have sectional or cultural undertones, ostensibly due to external influence from parents, religious leaders, community leaders and regrettably education providers. Thus the role of the school in culture transmission and development of positive value orientation is being undermined by the prevailing negative value orientation in the society.

Unemployment in the society and the idea of making quick money has also affected the value orientation of students in higher institutions. Interviews held with some students revealed their desire to secure very rewarding and prestigious white collar jobs after graduation. When graduates of higher institutions cannot be gainfully employed in a presently depressed economy, the temptation is high for them to manifest such maladaptive behaviors like robbery, kidnapping, drug peddling, and other fraudulent behaviors or easily get recruited into undesirable groups. Therefore, theoretical instruction on cultures and value orientation must be reflected in the behavior, attitudes and values of all those who are associated with the education of the youths.

Developing desirable values among students of higher Institutions

Prah (1992) asserted that, "if Africa is to move forward educationally and developmentally, the culture of the masses would need to be brought in from the cold. It is time for a drastic departure from the traditional undue emphasis on cognitive development so that the affective and psychomotor domains could be accorded greater attention. Since the general aim of education is to develop the learner in all the three educational domains, intellectual endowment should be seen as just one of the attributes of personality.

Recommendation

The university being an international institution is expected to be a melting point for all cultures, but paradoxically this is not always the case in Nigeria. If education is to succeed in promoting national integration in a plural society like Nigeria, more determined efforts must be made to integrate positive values into the education system at the tertiary levels. This could be achieved through the following suggestions:

1. Extending the duration of current courses related to Nigerian cultural values to run through a minimum of at least two semesters. Such a wider exposure will help students to be better prepared to appreciate the need to contribute to the nation's overall progress and unity irrespective of cultural differences.
2. Syllabus content must emphasize fairness and objectivity in dealing with one another or a group so that students can ultimately come to reject cultural and religious prejudices. Also, those at the corridors of power in higher institutions must live by examples through fairness and objectivity in their dealings with students and staff.
3. Efforts must be made by university authorities, teachers, parents, religious as well as community leaders to infuse the right type of values in students with a view to promoting national integration.
4. All vestiges of divisiveness like ethnicity, tribalism and religious bigotry must be removed in the day-to-day administration of tertiary institutions, and this implies that those who teach or preach moral standards must be seen to live above board in their general pattern of life.
5. While freedom of worship is entrenched in the nation's constitution, such freedom should be effectively controlled to prevent fanaticism, and subsequently religious clashes on campuses. This can be achieved through an organized orientation lecture during student's matriculation to make them aware of the consequences of any form of misdemeanor.
6. Citizenship education and training programs should be encouraged. These could be on short term basis through which participants will be assisted to develop such citizenship ideals like self-reliance, respect for others culture and religious inclinations, cooperation with others and helping others.
7. Since many students now enter higher institutions during the adolescent period, activities of social organizations as the Boys Scout, Red Cross, Girls Guide should be extended to the tertiary level with a view to helping the youths develop and internalize positive values of the society.
8. Counseling centers should be established in all campuses, and counselors must organize group counseling sessions to assist students clarify their values along acceptable societal norms. By so doing, students will grow to become responsible and disciplined citizens, thereby developing sound character and positive attitude to self and others.
9. Commendable behaviors must be rewarded appropriately. This will help the youths to aspire to become rationally altruistic individuals through the internalization of moral values and simultaneously adapting to the changing demands of a dynamic society like Nigeria.
10. Objectivity and fairness in voting and election procedures into student unionism positions and staff appointments should not be based upon cultural affinities but on merit.

However, in teaching cultural values all those concerned with education of youths should avoid imposing their personal values on the youth. It must be emphasized that values may alter with economic, political and cultural changes. Denga (1983) noted that national and social consciousness may change in a particular direction, depending on the current values of the society. Lecturers are therefore expected to be conversant with new development with a view of guiding the youths to develop appropriate moral, economic and political culture that will enhance the overall development and peaceful existence of the nation.

Conclusion

In a multi-ethnic society such as Nigeria, minority groups can be easily marginalized because of differences in traditions, biological, linguistic and cultural traits. Religious beliefs have set apart people for centuries dividing the world into religious zones of influence that fight against each other. As a developing nation, Nigeria must be assisted to develop in all aspects of life. This could be achieved by helping the youth develop the right values for the good of the society. This task should not be left to the teachers alone, but should involve everybody who is concerned with the education of the youths vis-a-vis the parents, traditional rulers, religious leaders and public servants. All these people have significant roles to play in providing the much needed moral and leadership training in the society

Youths at the tertiary institutions need guidance towards the right direction in developing appropriate value orientation and accommodating other people's cultures. They should therefore be assisted in developing independent thinking concerning their attitudes, beliefs and values. Every social institution like the home, school, church and mosque must directly and indirectly teach such positive values as honesty, diligence, humility, cooperation, respect for other peoples' rights, patriotic habits, service to others and nation since these will help enhance and sustain the survival of a plural society like Nigeria.

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