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Social Studies Education: A Vehicle for Conflict Resolution and Peace Building in Nigeria's Heterogeneous Society

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Abstract:

Nigeria is a heterogeneous society bifurcated along ethnic, religious, cultural and regional lines. It is the manipulations of diacritical and other social characteristics by the Nigerian elites in their contest for power and resources that is responsible for the endemic violent conflicts which this country has been witnessing since colonial times. The paper tries to examine how social studies education can be used to resolve conflictual relations among Nigerians that often leads to violent destruction of lives and properties. The purpose of this paper is therefore to use social studies education to help the young learners acquire basic societal ethos and appropriate attitudinal dispositions capable of diminishing cultural ethnocentrism and promote peace, cooperation and national pride. This calls for the restructuring of social studies curricular content to dwell extensively on conflict resolution as well as the application of relevant pedagogical knowledge by programme implementers (teachers) to instill values and skills for effective living in a democratic society. The paper revolves around conceptual issues, the root causes and effects of conflicts in Nigeria, the challenges of social studies education and the role of social studies education as a means of conflict resolution and peace building and recommendations.

Keywords: *Heterogeneous society, conflict, social studies and peace building.*

1. Introduction

Nigeria like most developing countries is at a cross-road as to how to nurture among its citizens a national spirit that would transform primordial sentiments considered counter-productive to national unity and development. The Nigerian socio-cultural and political environments have been reduced to a theatre of ethno-religious conflicts, inter-communal hostilities, hostage-taking and terrorist activities inimical to the national aspiration of building "a free and democratic society; a just and egalitarian society; united, strong and self-reliant nation; a great and dynamic economy; and a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens" (NPE, 2013). Social studies which was introduced mainly to instill relevant values, attitudes and skills in the citizens for national reconstruction and transformation has not brought about the desired change. The paper argued that the problem is not so much with social studies as a subject but the operationalization of the curriculum and the need to constantly expand the content of the curriculum in line with emerging issues and problems of national unity and integration. The Nigerian man lacks values and traits of effective citizenship hence social studies curriculum is prepared to nurture values such as "tolerance, honesty, respect for human dignity and patriotism" (Falade, 2008).

The history of post-colonial Nigeria has been the history of conflicts and violent contestations between classes, religious groups, regions and tribes for the control of power and other resources. Some of these conflicts include the fratricidal wars that pitched the Ibos against the rest of Nigerians between 1967 – 70, the sporadic Tiv – Jukum hostilities, the Maitatsine religious riot of the 1980s, the Sharia uprisings in the northern cities that reverberated across the length and breadth of this country, the Zongo – Kafaf debacle, the Niger – Delta insurgency which culminated in the clamour for the control of oil resources and hostage-taking, the Ife-Modakeke crisis, the Jos religious and ethnic contestation between Berom and Hausa over the ownerships and control of Jos and the Boko-Haramic Islamic insurgency fighting to establish Islamic state in Nigeria against the avowed constitutional declaration of Nigeria as a secular state. The lives and properties lost to these crises or conflicts are enormous and have bred acrimony, suspicion and prejudices among the people thus, making any efforts at conflict resolution and peace-building a near impossible task.

The paper examines the factors that triggered off these conflicts and insists that social studies curriculum, if properly operationalized and constantly expanded to include emerging issues bordering on conflict resolution and peace, it can significantly minimize conflicts in Nigeria. The paper further submits that adherence to pedagogical strategies and innovations by teachers is the surest way of instilling appropriate attitudes and values for peaceful coexistence in Nigeria's heterogeneous society.

2. Conceptual Clarification

It is pertinent to briefly clarify certain concepts used in this paper to aid our understanding and appreciation of the topic under discussion as this will provide the road-map for analysis and evaluation of the work.

2.1. Conflict

Conflict occurs when there is disagreement between parties (individuals, groups or nations) to the extent that each party's interests, needs and concerns are threatened. Sociologically speaking, conflict is a normal feature of all known human society. The reason for this can be deduced from the fact that human aspirations, desires, preferences and interests are always at variance and as such when people come together, each individual, group or nation tries to project its interest over and above the other hence conflict. Coser (1956:7) defined conflict as "a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals." In a similar vein, conflict can be seen as the struggle, quarrel, fight or a long dispute between two people or groups of people, employers and workers over deferring opinions or desires over time to the extent that it may degenerate into violence. Conflict is important for human growth and development provided it is not allowed to degenerate into violence where lives and properties are destroyed. Conflict provides platforms for conflicting parties to articulate their goals and aspirations as well as analyze and reconstruct such goals and aspiration for the emergence of collective identity and development (Albert, 2005).

2.2. Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution on the other hand is a way of addressing the root causes of conflict to the satisfactions of the parties involved in the conflict to the extent that they no longer behave violent to one another or exhibit attitudes that are hostile any longer. Michell and Banks (1996:21) succinctly defined conflict resolution in the following words:

- an outcome in which the issues in an existing conflict are satisfactorily dealt with through a Solution that is mutually acceptable to the parties, self sustaining in the long run and productive of a new, positive relationship between parties that were previously hostile adversaries; and process or procedure by which such an outcome is achieved.

2.3. Peace

Peace is all about cultivating attitudes and values that are germane to democratic culture of making people work together, share together, help one another by respecting the rights of others, obey the rule of law and promote social justice. It is a conscientizing process that helps to eliminate prejudices, stereotypes and hatred among people of diverse nationality by encouraging harmonious coexistence (Ezeoba, 2012). Peace building is the learning and internationalization of values antithetical to violence.

2.4. Social Studies

There is no consensual definition of social studies by the subject specialists. As an interdisciplinary field of study, social studies deals with a wide range of issues in man's multifaceted environment. Its objective is "to prepare the young people to be humane, rational thinking and participating citizens in a world that is becoming increasingly interdependent" (Arise, 2011). Quoting Kissock, Mbaba (2007) conceptualized social studies as a programme of study a society uses to instill in students or learners the knowledge, skills attitudes and action it considers important concerning the relationship human beings have with each other, their world and themselves. This means that social studies is an educational programme by which behaviours, attitudes, norms and values considered worthwhile are preserved and inculcated to the young learners for effective participation in society. It is an interdisciplinary study of issues and problems that can help the learners to become civically competent in dealing with the problems of survival in their environment (NCSS, 2011:1 & Arise, 2011). The major concern of social studies is therefore the identification and cultivation of positive values, attitudes and skills in the learners for societal reconstruction and development.

3. The Genesis and Effects of Conflict in Nigeria

The heterogeneity of Nigerian society makes it susceptible to a repertoire of manipulations and cleavages. In Nigeria, these cleavages manifest themselves in ethnic jingoism, religion fundamentalism and regional chauvinism. The ethno-religious conflicts pervading the Nigerian socio-political environment over the years can principally be attributed to the ways and manners in which the collective resources of mankind is appropriated for the criminal consumption of a tiny minority of men and women in power thus, push the majority to the tight corners of social destitution, pauperism and helplessness. According to Salawu (2010) conflict occurs when the deprived groups and individuals attempt to overturn the social order to benefit them or modify the dominant values, norms, or ideology that thwart their access to the wealth of the society.

Another related factor is the malfunctionality of social institutions like the family, the religious organization, education, law and political systems. These institutions have collectively or individually caused phenomenal rise in the volume of crime and conflicts in Nigeria. Salawu (2010) attributes the present high rate of decadence to the inability of many homes to make ends meet. Children from such homes take to streets as beggars, hoodlums, home breakers, prostitutes and as such become ready tools in the hands of desperate politicians to cause trouble. These underdogs of the society are manipulated because of their ignorance, ethnicity religion etc. to fight for a cause they know little or nothing about. A case in point was the report in Punch Newspaper of July, 17 by Mohammed (2014) that two persons died and a house belonging to an Eggon man was set ablaze in an anti- impeachment protest in defense of Governor Almakura of Nasarawa State. According to the report the impeachment move did not go down well with the Gwandara youths (the governor's tribal group) who took to the streets and defaced the posters of Mr. Labaran Maku, an Eggon man and a gubernatorial

aspirant, accused of masterminding the impeachment. This is a disservice to historical record that a constitutional issue such as impeachment could be manipulated by ethnic jingoists and desperate politician to cause trouble. The youth who turned out in their numbers were said to have been hired by the power –that – be to cause mayhem to discredit the State Assembly (Alechenu & Mohammed, 2014) and Labaran Maku who was the a hot contender for the office of the state governor.

The Nigeria educational system has contributed to the social decay in Nigeria according to Salawu (2010); the school system in Nigeria today can no longer impact sound education and instill discipline due to corruption. The religious institutions are intolerant of each other's beliefs, fuels inter- faith quarrels and preaches violence.

The law enforcement agents who are supposed to exhibit exemplary conduct are themselves the breakers of law. They demand and collect bribes from motorists and make it appears as if it is a normal way of life. The failure of Nigerian leaders to run the affairs of the state on the principles of equity and social justices, Salawu (2010) further argued provides a hotbed for criminal tendencies and conflicts of varying dimension in Nigeria.

Ethno-religious conflicts have posed serious danger to the corporate existence of Nigeria. The conflicts have made Nigerians of different socio-cultural backgrounds and faith to hate themselves and this has weakened any sense of patriotism and commitment of the people to national ideals and true nationhood (Fawole & Bello, 2011). For instance the Zongo and Kataf people, the Tivs and the Jukums, the Ifes and the Modakekes, the Hausas and the Beroms etc. who were hitherto living harmoniously with one another now see themselves as avowed enemies who cannot be trusted and relied upon for anything or work together for the progress of their society.

Commenting on the devastating effects of ethnic conflict with respect to Jos crisis, Obasanjo (2004) averred:

- violence has reached unprecedented levels and hundreds have been killed with much more wounded or displaced from their homes on account of their ethnic or religious identification. Schooling for children has been disrupted and interrupted; business lost billions of naira and property worth much more destroyed.

Apart from lives and property that were destroyed, visitors and investors operating one form of business or the others had to desert the state including their businesses. The rise of Boko Haram as a terrorist organization has crippled the socio-economic and political life of Nigerians particularly the affected north-eastern states of Nigeria (Oladunjoye & Omemu, 2013). In fact, the demonic brutality being unleashed on innocent citizens of this country through suicide bombings and hostage-taking are some of the ungodly effects of this terrorist organization.

4. The Challenge of Social Studies Education in Nigeria Today

The goals of social studies education as means of inculcating basic societal skills, attitude and values for civic competence or effective participation in a democratic society remain a wishful thinking due to the faulty nature of its curriculum design and implementation. Ezegeba in Agu (2001) put forward the following as the objectives of social studies education in Nigeria but which realization remains a dream. He summarizes the objectives as follows.

- i. To help man develop valuable and socially acceptable concept, ideals and philosophy of life;
- ii. To help man develop proper value judgment and ability to criticize, select and place events in their proper perspectives; and
- iii. To help Nigerian teachers, pupils and students to discover what is good and unique in the physical, social, economic environments which hitherto have been neglected;

Social studies as it is currently designed and taught in Nigeria lack content adequacy to address the above stated objectives. Since social conflict has become a dominant feature of the Nigerian society, social studies education as a problem solving subject should incorporate peace education and social justice that can dilute centrifugal forces by eliminating prejudices, stereotypes and hatred among tribes and faith. (Ezeoba, 2012). Apart from content inadequacy, Meziobi (2012) argued that a cursory look at the content of social studies would reveal the overlapping and unnecessary duplication and in some cases the contents of the programme and their titles do not go together.

Another challenge to the realization of inculcating socially desirable ideals and philosophy of life through social studies education as envisaged by the curriculum planners is over dependence and application of expository/presentation teaching methods (Meziobi, 2012). Practical- orientated teaching methods that could bring about interaction between teachers and students, students themselves and their environment capable of eliciting the desired learning outcomes in the learner are ignored or relegated.

One of the most critical challenges facing social studies teacher today is the use of instructional materials and resources. Most social studies teacher make use of chalkboard, pictures diagrams etc. in their lesson delivery but ignore audio and audio-visual materials and community resources which are critical to the learning and internalization of values and norms.

Another challenge facing the realization of achieving the goal of social studies education is the employment of non- professionals to teach social studies in the belief that since social studies in the amalgam of the social sciences, any social science expert could teach it (Uko & Okebe, 2012)

5. Repositioning Social Studies Education for Conflict Resolution and Peace-Building

It is not an overstatement to posit that Nigeria today is a chaotic, aimless or directionless nation given the seemingly intractable problems facing this country. Worried by this state of affairs, the Nigerian politicians, businessmen and intellectual communities have tried to identify the root causes of the problem with a view to resolving them. Some people attribute the problem to corruption, directionless leadership, reckless squander mania and unbridled materialistic tendencies. Such people use militaristic approach typical of the -Buhari/Idiagbon administration to deal with the problem of attitudes and values thus failing to realize that attitude and values can be acquire through a systematic process of education and not by any draconian means. Okolo (1993) viewed the problem from the perspective of the Nigerian citizen, his values and priorities which determine his philosophy of life. Nigeria, if she must overcome or

substantially minimize the problems tearing its citizens apart, have to reposition social studies education to produce people with the right kind of values and priorities for peaceful coexistence and sustainable development.

A glimpse at social studies curriculum at all levels of education shows that the subject has the potential to promote unity and solidarity among its diverse group. Its content, however, needs to be expanded and appropriate pedagogical strategies need to be put in place by teachers to inculcate the right type of values to the learners. This calls for the employment of problem-solving method. This enhances critical thinking and objective reflection on issues, events and situations through self discovery (Fageyinbo 2004). Also important is the use of activity method. It equips the learners with the opportunity to express their thought, perception and problems presented to them (Nwananwu, 1999). Under this method, activities such as discussion, simulation, dramatization and concept-mapping are used to facilitate learning of attitudes and values. In other word, the methods of teaching should be able to elicit responses in the learners the three domains of educational objectives viz; the cognitive, the psycho- motor and the effective domains. (Arise 2012)

For social studies education in Nigeria to deal with ethno- religious crisis, its contents must be elaborated to include cross- cultural studies of people in Nigeria and other societies, human rights, community peace and conflict resolution, democratic ideals, Nigeria monument and legacies, prospect of inter- tribal marriages and National resources and resource problems in Nigeria (Ezeoba, 2012). In a heterogeneous society like Nigeria with weak national spirit, these topics are important for conflict resolution and peace building processes.

6. Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion; it is now crystal clear that social studies education focuses on the inculcation of the right type of attitudes, values and skills that will coalesce in the formation and development of national consciousness. When people are adequately educated and made to acquire basic social skills and values of the society right from the kindergarten through to primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education, the tendency is that hardly can such people be threats to peaceful coexistence. No matter how well – structured social studies curriculum may appear to be, it remains a farce if appropriate pedagogical strategies are not employed by experts to equip the learners with relevant skills, attitudes and values. This therefore means that the teachers of social studies must be professionally skilled to effectively teach the subject to realize it goals.

7. Recommendation

- The content of social studies should constantly be overhauled to deal with emerging issues and problem of survival in society.
- Themes such as cross- cultural studies, human rights, and social justice should be the focal point of social studies education in a conflict-ridden society like Nigeria.
- Only professionals should be made to teach the subject.
- Well – remunerated salary packages be paid to the teachers of social studies to boost their morale.

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