SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY AS NIGERIA: A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

Ireyefoju, J.

Department of Social Sciences Education
Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria
E-mail: esccogunobitezion@yahoo.com

Ireyefoju, J. (Jnr)

Department of Educational Studies and Management
University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria
Email: jireyefoju@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper was an attempt to introduce multicultural education through social studies education in a multicultural society. Through conceptual analysis, this it examined how reflective thinking as a necessary logical condition can stimulate the learner to developing the right values and attitudes that can enable him cope with the challenges of living in a multicultural society. In doing this, this paper examined the theories of pluralism, the notions of multiculturalism, social studies and the teaching and learning of multicultural education. It was concluded that multicultural education should be incorporated at all levels of Nigeria education, so that the learner can understand that the issue of multiculturalism in the Nigerian state can be solved through education.

Keywords: social studies education, multiculturalism, multicultural education, critical thinking

INTRODUCTION

Social studies education as a subject in primary and secondary schools, or as a field of disciplined inquiry, or an education programme in tertiary institutions is a human construct to foster nationalism and patriotism on the one hand and for man to realize his existent as both individual and citizen in a multicultural society on the other hand. In other words, social studies education in Nigeria is to construct possible approaches of fostering and implementing the national educational goals which Bamisaiye (1989) regarded as the ideal knowledge in education.

The national education goals include the inculcation of national consciousness and national unity; encouraging the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and society. Others include developing the learner's mind to understanding the world around; and acquiring the required and appropriate skills that will encourage all round development - mentally, physically and socially - that will foster individual contribution to local and national development (FRN, 2004:).

Assuming this national education goal as its (social studies education goals and objectives) is against the background that Nigeria is a collection of different ethnic nationalities brought together by metaphysical tendency of the British to achieving a nation state, without due consideration to the particular features or civilization of the Nigerian people.

Faulting the shortsightedness of the British, Allen (1982) argues that the British should have taken into cognizance "whether the extended family system is strong or weak, whether the nuclear family is different from or part of the extended family system, whether or not there are different observable sex roles with families and social life generally" before establishing a nation state. However, it is possible that the British had done so based on her experience of the formation of a nation in the Western world. In

the Western sense of nationhood, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jacques Rousseau, according to Omoregbe (2007; 1996), claimed that the evolution of nation state is a matter of association, a social contract. Traditional African experience (the undiluted African society) shows that nationhood is achieved on communal basis rather than association. They believe that for a state to exist and for people to live together in a given society there must be communal basis. This view, to a remarkable extent, has changed in Africa due to contact with other cultures of the world.

It is in the opinion of this paper that the survival of association in any given society largely depends on communal basis. In other words, even though the African peoples tend to move apart, may be recognizing natural, socio-cultural, geographical and political factors or differences in themselves and society, experience has shown that differences are the construction and perpetuation of man. Believing so much on how education has helped in transforming other nations in the world, the Nigerian state intends to use education as an instrument to build a virile and enabling environment for peoples from different geographical, social, religious, cultural and political backgrounds.

This claim is informed by the people's understanding of the need for cooperation and togetherness in a multiethnic society and the guarantee that every individual can develop himself and contribute positively to national development. The idea for constructing education is to meet the critical needs of any given society, be it primitive or industrial, developed or developing.

However, in practice the Nigerian state is far from achieving this much-needed change expected that is because the average Nigerian and the politicians aim at success without consideration for the process and strategies that inform success. Multiculturalism is not a peculiarity of any country or continent. Different countries search for ways to resolve issues bordering on natural, geographical, social, cultural, economic, ethnic, racial, political, linguistic, and

religious differences. The school, as one of the agents of education in modern society, is saddled with the responsibility of tackling or resolving individual and societal problems.

It is against this backdrop that this study examines how social studies education can foster understanding in a multicultural society - by inculcating and implementing the right type of values and respect for the worth and dignity of the individual, as the first quality of instruction in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004). Understanding our differences, is believed will foster peace and harmony, mutual and cordial relationships in the midst of disunity in the Nigerian state.

In doing this, this paper adopts the philosophical survey method of conceptual analysis in attempting to examine the notion of multiculturalism and the state of affairs in the Nigerian state, the task of education in a multicultural society or the possibilities for social studies education to foster and encourage understanding through the school system. This study is significant because it will encourage the Nigerian learner to look beyond the present inherent feature of theoretical epistemology in Nigeria education by fostering reflective thinking as an alternative way of also looking at issues, challenges, and problems.

EDUCATION AND MULTI-CULTURES

One of the influences of modernization, improvement in science and technology, and globalization is the interaction between the peoples of different cultures to the degree that no culture can claim wholesomeness or purity. Trade, better opportunity, hospitality, education, and survival are some of the factors that stimulate people and nations to have contacts with other people of the world. The claim that one cannot do it all alone encourages interdependence across cultural boundaries and even within cultures. Since there is bound to be contact between people of

different cultures either in school, place of work, market, or by means of transportation, educators, sociologists and politicians espoused theories of pluralism-assimilation and cultural pluralism-as options for a multicultural society.

Assimilation, according to Gollnick and Chinn (1994), is the process through which groups adopt or change the dominant group or culture. This is realizable by allowing the distinguishing cultural patterns of the two groups disappear, the distinctive cultural patterns of the two groups become one or part of the dominant culture or a combination of the two occurs.

This assimilation process, according to Gordon (1964), develops through stages in which the new cultural groups: changes its cultural patterns to those of the dominant group; develops large-scale primary-group relationships with the dominant group; intermarries fully with the dominant group. Other stages include loses its sense of peoplehood as separate from the dominant group; encounters no discrimination; encounters no prejudiced attitudes; and does not raise any issue that would involve value and power conflict with the dominant group.

The first theory of assimilation is "acculturation" where the minority or oppressed group adopts the cultural pattern of the dominant group. This however depends on several factors, which include location of and discrimination against the minority group. The further the minority group is from the dominant group the slower the acculturation process. "Structural assimilation", another theory of assimilation, occurs when the two groups share primary relationships, including membership in the same cliques and social clubs as a logical necessary condition for reducing or eliminating prejudice and discrimination in society.

Exposing minority group to the same educational and occupational opportunities and large-scale intermarriage with the dominant group are some of the ways of achieving assimilation. If

the assimilation process is effective, Gordon argued, it would lead to the disappearance of the cultural group that is distinct from the dominant group. Importantly, the individual of the minority group in part determines the success of acculturation by deciding how much he wants to speak, dress and act like the dominant group.

In other words, the individual either gives up his behaviour or keeps them from public view, as much as he can. Another assimilation theory is the "melting pot" or "amalgamation." It is a unique culture or a new social order to which every ethnic group contributes to its sustenance (Williamson, 1980). It is a theory anchored on egalitarian principles or democratic ideals such as responsibility, equality, freedom, and social justice.

Every ethnic group realizes that her culture is not superior to any other culture in society. It is awareness that different from does not necessarily imply "better than" or "worse than" (Ukeje, 1979). Rather it provides an avenue for better understanding of each other's cultural differences and the joy to participate in someone else's culture. On this ground, man becomes the fulcrum of interaction, not ethnicity, culture (not holding onto those features that distinguished them from each other). However, the theory of assimilation does not characterize any society, as a basis of its operation. The state of affairs around the world is that of nations with different ethnic nationalities distinguished by their ethnicity, religion, language, gender, class, and so on.

Most macro-cultures do not which to assimilate other micro-cultures even if they do there are traces of discrimination and prejudice. This is not to say that the theory of assimilation has not influenced the social, political, and educational policies and practices of most countries. The Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy in the 1999 Constitution are informed by Government intention to build the Nigerian state on the principles of assimilation.

Cultural pluralism as a theory of pluralism or multiculturalism becomes expedient and necessary because since macro-cultures refused to permit micro-cultures access into the mainstream of things many minority groups decide to maintain their own uniqueness. Organizing a multicultural society in accordance with the theory of cultural pluralism, according to Pratte (1979), two or more distinct groups function separately without requiring assimilation of one into the other. Pratte (1979) identifies the following three salient criteria for the application of cultural pluralism in a multicultural society:

1. Cultural diversity, in the form of a number of groups - be it political, racial, ethnic, religious, economic, or age - is exhibited in society.
2. The coexisting groups approximate equal political, economic, and educational opportunity.
3. There is a behavioural commitment to the values of cultural pluralism as a basis for a viable system of social organization.

Most plural societies like the American society do not meet this theory of cultural pluralism. This is because there is in existence income inequality. The dominant group is not committed to the values of cultural pluralism, nor does it want to share its political power with minority groups. For cultural pluralism to be a reality, according to Gollnick and Chinn (1994), the nation would recognize the various ethnic, religious groups that could coexist with each other. Cultural pluralism, to them, in principle we think, requires that power and resources are equitably distributed or shared across these groups, based on democratic principles.

However, some critics, according to Gollnick and Chinn, believed that the dominant group or the group that controls the economic wealth of the State adopts a divide and rule approach to keep ethnic groups apart and fights among themselves for the few

available resources allocated to them. Some critics are of the opinion that the goal of society should be the integration of cultural groups and the promotion of more equality across groups through a united front. Nevertheless, how effective are these united fronts in the struggle for equitable distribution of available resources in a multicultural state like Nigeria? United front like civil societies, unlike cultural or ethnic fronts, has contributed much to the welfare of the less privilege in society. Others are of the view that individuals should maintain their ethnic identity while participating in the macro-culture. Whatever these beliefs may be, integration is still possible without each micro-cultures relinquishing their ethnic identities. An integrated society can also lead to greater assimilation.

THE NOTION OF MULTICULTURALISM

The philosophical bearing on the conception of the notion of multiculturalism is the need to understand one another in the world and Nigeria in particular where natural and artificial barriers will no longer count as hindrance to world social, scientific and technological, economic, and political progress. In other words, since this is the only world we have it therefore behooves man as a duty to safeguard it within the limit of his limited resources.

This notion sounds mythical and realistic at the same time. It is mythical in the sense that everyman is a product of his culture to the degree that how a person perceives, thinks, feels, evaluates and acts are determinate of culture. That is, human action is informed by the circumstances, happenings and geographical factors of any society (Peoples and Bailey, 1994; Goodenough, 1987). Put differently, culture makes man feel, think and behave the way he does in society. Granted that man by nature is different from each other physiologically and biologically, culture helps, in certain degree, to strengthen these variations in accordance with climatic conditions of the region and the relationship that exists

between minority groups and the dominant groups in society. It is against this mythical position this paper seems to argue that multiculturalism is impossibility.

However, from the realistic posture, all human beings, according to Gollnick and Chinn (1994), seem to undergo the same poignant life experiences of birth, helplessness, marriage, old age, illness and death. Humans also share common institutions like marriage ceremonies, naming ceremonies, taboos, and so on. However, the way in which each group handles the same life experiences and creates the same institutions, Gollnick and Chinn argued, is limitless; in the sense that, these differences are not innate; rather these differences are culturally determined.

Therefore, it is something one can learn. If culture is not innate, it follows that it is an artificial creation of society, therefore, the myth whether a mutual coexistence is attainable is realistic. There is need to understand, for example, why the Ijaw (of the South-South region of Nigeria) person exercises unrestricted outpour of emotion at the death and funeral of a beloved one in the family. On the other hand, the Hausa/Fulani is likely to be more emotionally restrained at a public funeral.

The habit, reaction of a people is understood within the context of their culture. The Isekiri or Ilaje of the South-South and Western regions of Nigeria, respectively behave the way they do because that is the accepted and patterned way of behaviour which differentiate them from other ethnic nationalities. Differences are mark of identity which the people perpetuate through words, gestures, facial expressions, actions, and so on (Hall, 1977).

Through the process of enculturation and socialization, a people learn the ways of doing things peculiar to them. The process also affords society to initiate their new entrants into how the people behave by those who have previous education, through observation of and participation in their culture and society.

People of different ethnic groups, religions, languages, classes, as well as natural differences occasioned by age, sex, and physical and mental abilities and competencies constitute Nigeria, as a multicultural society. Both teachers and learners are exposed to a social curriculum that makes positive, derogatory, and negative statements or utterances about their differences through the media, family attitude and ethnic prejudice. Every ethnic nationality or person has distorted messages about every other ethnic nationalities or persons in the country. For instance, while the Isekiri are described as proud and complacent, the Ilaje are also proud and unforgiving. The Igbo are seen as deceptive and tribal. On the positive side, the Igbos are industrious; the Ilaje are accommodative and hospitable and while the Isekiri are merciful and caring.

To other areas of the social curriculum, the female, in popular thinking, are weak, individual with disabilities are helpless, and those at the top are insensitive to the needs of the poor. These stereotypes about persons and groups of people are misconceptions and unhealthy generalizations that totally neglect the majority of individuals within each of these groups. What, then, should be the task of education? Put differently, to what extent can social studies education inculcate the right type of values and attitude that will stimulate the tendency to live a contributory life in a multicultural society?

SOCIAL STUDIES AND MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

By the nature of social studies curriculum, according to Okunloye (2003) it is designed to resolve and solve issues and problems encountered by youth around the world, so that they can confront their challenges as individuals and citizens. Social studies and multicultural education presupposes the incorporation of cultural knowledge at all levels of education because what is considered as values, beliefs are learnt through education in personal relations.

Cultural knowledge, according to Peoples and Bailey (1994), includes shared transmitted norms, values, beliefs, attitudes, ideas, meanings, collective understanding, categories of classifying reality, and worldviews. Cultural knowledge in the Nigerian state, we think, would stimulate the physical abilities and mental competencies of the learner to the extent of being able to confront the challenges of the multicultural nature of the Nigerian society. as well as making education meaningful to the learner and realistic to all aspects of his environment.

This eventually will lead to reduction in theoretical epistemology, de-alienation of education and encourage the learner to make moral decisions on personal conviction. This is probably against the belief that the learner, as claimed by Francis Bacon and Rene Descarte, carries with him, all the time, the power of ratiocination and power of sense experience (Okoroh, 2000). Some scholars believed that the lack of a consensus set of values referred to as the Nigerian Value System would make it practically impossible to inculcate the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual in the Nigerian multicultural society (Amaele, 2005; Oroka, 1990).

As much as this view is tenable, this paper does not share this view, rather inculcating the right type of values and attitudes as a way of guarantying the survival of the individual in a multicultural society does not necessarily point at the evolution of certain set of values referred to as Nigerian Value System. What is necessary is to cultivate in the learner the ability to develop necessary attitudinal skills (such as forgiveness, endurance, patience, tolerance, perseverance, commitment, sharing in the principle of give and take of friendship) through his participation in any kind of social relationship - communal or association.

However, this is not to say that values are inconsequential. The position of this paper is that since culture is dear to each of the ethnic group to the extent that none of the ethnic groups is willing to relinquish its culture, it behooves the social studies educator to

stimulate in the learner reflective attitude, which encourages mental phenomena, including judging, deciding, choosing, reasoning and thinking, executing, and loving. As against the theoretical explanation and revealed knowledge which often characterized the epistemological orientation of knowledge among some persons.

In realizing this goal, the classroom should be a model of what the Nigerian state intends to realize at the end of the day through education - a state build on democratic principles of freedom, social justice, and equality (FRN, 1999). This requires, according to Gollnick and Chinn (1994), that educators (particularly the social studies educator) place the learner, not the subject matter, at the centre of the teaching- learning process; promote human rights and respect for cultural diversities; believe that every learner is capable of learning; acknowledge and build on the history and experience of the learner's micro-cultural membership.

Other requirements include critically analyze oppression and power relationship to understand regionalism, federal character and quota system, 'godfatherism', nepotism, sexism, classism, and discrimination against the disabled, aged and minority; critique society in the interest of social justice and equality; and participate in collective social action to ensure a democratic society.

Rather than dangling between two cultures, the social studies educator should actively participate in the social life of the host community as well as in the process of directing, shaping and leading the culture, with the view to rectifying it. This enables the social studies educator's knowledge of the learner's culture and enable him make the academic content of his teaching more meaningful to the learner by relating it to his experiences (Ogbu, 1992). The incorporation of cultural diversity in the school curriculum at all levels of education is to enable the learner feel and think that cultural differences can be taught through school subjects and not only through education in personal relationships, as in the case in Nigeria.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The multicultural nature of the Nigerian society makes it necessary for the incorporation of multicultural education at all levels of education as well as teaching it through the various education programmes and school subjects by adopting a suitable approach. The various cultures that constitute the Nigerian cultural heritage would encourage the learner to develop appropriate attitudinal skills that would enable him live with others whose cultures are different from his own in a multicultural society.

In addition, the learner discovers that human actions are informed by circumstances and geographical conditions of a place, therefore whatever the learner does ought to be taken on rational ground, and bearing in mind the consequences of his actions. The social studies educator must see himself as an enabler, a facilitator of knowledge that will stimulate in the learner the ability to cultivate appropriate attitudinal skills for his own survival and that of society. In preparing and teaching lessons in multicultural education, according to Awoyemi (1990), the social studies educator should always put in focus the citizenship education trust of social studies.

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