

Peace Dilemma in Nigeria: A Case for a Peace Education Programme for Elementary School Children

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Abstract

Peace Education Programme is the type of education that inculcates in learners the right type of tenets that would make them live peacefully in the society. It essentially infuses in students values that would bring about peaceful social integration. Such values include the maintenance of discipline, respect, recognition of the principles of cultural relativity and the effect of cultural ethnocentrism, respect for other people's rights, embracement of social competency and citizenship education. The non recognition and inability of people to maintain these values meant the occurrence and re-occurrence of rancours, political turbulence, economic related offences, acrimonies, frustration and social vices in the society. This study explained the probable solution to the problem of integration in Nigeria by encouraging the teaching of Peace Education in our elementary schools- a way of embracing the "principles of catch them young".

This paper therefore highlighted the components of Peace Education relevant to the achievement of social competency and citizenship education. If the tenets are properly taught, it is hopeful that children would imbibe the spirit of peaceful co-existence with other members in the society regardless of the class, sex, socio-economic, ethnic or educational background differences.

Introduction

Many efforts have been made by the people of Nigeria including the government at different levels to integrate Nigerians. Part of such integration measures includes the introduction of the National Youth Service Corps administration; establishment of Federal institutions, the use of Federal character in the country and the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board. The National Policy on Education in the country explains education concerning social integration.

According to the policy, the overall philosophy of Nigeria is to:

1. live in unity and harmony as one indivisible, indissoluble, democratic and sovereign nation founded on the principles of freedom, equality and justice.
2. promote inter-African solidarity and world peace through understanding.

The Nigeria's philosophy of education therefore is based on:

1. the development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen
2. the full integration of the individual into the community.

The efforts of the government of Nigeria to implement these policies through the school subjects put in place to accomplish these goals include Social Studies, and Moral Education. Adaralegbe (1978); Ogunsanya (1984); Obidoa (1991) and CESAC (1993) wrote that: Social Studies in Nigeria is specifically included in the school curriculum to make Nigerians achieve the goal of

becoming good citizens who would be able to make the country achieve her national goals and objectives.

Moral education was introduced into the school system at the elementary stage in order to inculcate moral uprightness in small children so that by the time they grow up they would not become a menace to the nation. Such factors that militate against the achievement of the goals set for these subjects include: poor teaching methods, lackadaisical attitudes of the learners to learning because of social influences such as the attitude of the masses especially in regards to looking for money or wealth at all cost, corruption by law enforcement agents and politicians and the inconsistencies of government policies as regards education (Adesina, 2010). However, Civic education is recently being introduced to the school system in Nigeria as a measure of curbing social ills (Ojedokun, Adesina & Adeyemi, 2010). The effect of this is still too early to know.

The introduction of peace education to elementary school children is likely to instill the values of peaceful co-existence in children. The chaotic situation in the country calls for a very quick and lasting solution. Incessant feuds and emotional instability (caused by activities of the hoodlums, criminals, cult members, Boko Haram in the Northern part of the country, and religious fanatics) and the common government-trade unions' misunderstandings and confrontations call for a lasting solution. This paper is mainly suggesting peace education for elementary school children with the hope of giving them the opportunity to have the spirit of oneness, loyalty, patriotism and good human relations. These qualities are prerequisites for averting trouble and embracing peaceful co-existence of the members of the society.

This paper therefore unpacks the problems of social unrest in Nigeria and establishes the fact that if Peace Education is included as a school subject at the elementary school level, children would learn much about the right type of behaviours and values that need to be embraced. The inclusion of Peace Education in the school curriculum will emphasize social integration needs and come up as a study area complementary to school subjects that teach moral values to students.

Peace Problems in Nigeria: Pre-Colonial and Colonial Era in Perspective

There were evidence of feuds or conflicts, acrimonies, rancours and political disturbances in Nigeria even before colonial officers emerged as leaders in the country. Examples of conflicts include the Ijaye, kiriji wars, Ogun Jalumi, Jihad of Uthman Dan Fodio, Ife and Igbo raids, Alaafin and Afonja confrontations and boundary disputes between different ethnic and intra ethnic groups of people in pre-colonial Nigeria. An incessant discord among ethnic groups in Nigeria makes the general political, economic and social growth of the country stand at a high risk.

Also in the colonial dispensation, Nigerians witnessed the Aba Women Riot of 1929, Kano Riot of 1954 and boundary disputes in many parts of the country. It should however be disclosed here that the colonial era ended many political rancours in the country. For example, the Kiriji wars were ended by the white interveners in Yoruba land. Warring groups (Ibadan versus Ekiti parapo) in Yoruba land were reconciled and peace reigned better than before as soon as the colonial imperialist took over the Nigerian government. However, the action of the colonial officers in regards to their policy of amalgamation rekindled fresh political turmoil in the country. The 1914 amalgamation generated suspicion and distrust particularly between Southerners and Northerners and this was the beginning of Nigeria's problem of ethnicity. The amalgamation did not go down well with both the Southerners and the Northerners. Therefore there existed considerable disunity and distrust. Pre-independence political parties and up till the second attempt at democracy were formed along very strong ethnic lines with negligible ideological agreement among the members of the same party (Ademoyega, 1981; Ojiako, 1982 and Adegboyega, 1991).

Peace Problems in Post Colonial Nigeria

Nigerians since independence in 1960 have witnessed both inter-ethnic and intra ethnic, religious conflicts and student unrest many times. There were clashes between ethnic groups, for example the clash between Hausas and the Yorubas in Lagos which had spill over effect in Kano, ethnic-religious riots at Kaduna which extended up to the south-eastern Nigeria, particularly in the Enugu and Abia States. There were the Tivs and Jukuns tribal wars in 1991, 1992 and 1993, the Kataf and Hausa/ Fulani in Kafanchan in 1988, the Sayawas and Fulanis in Bauchi, 1986 and the prolonged tribal wars between the Ijaws and Itsekiris in 1991 and 1992. Also, there were many clashes in Nigeria which involved the ethnic militia groups like the Bakasi Boys, Egbesu Boys and the Oodua Peoples' Congress (OPC).

In the military, tribalism reigns. For example, the disposal of the then head of state, Major General Aguiyi Ironsi and the ushering in of a junior officer from the North, Lt. Col, Yakubu When Gowon exposed the tribalism tendencies of Nigerians this and other factors led to the civil war between 1966 and 1970 (Ademoyega, 1981; Ojiako, 1982 and Adamolekun, 1991).

Peace Problems and Curriculum

To this end curriculum planners and educators wrote many curricula with the hope of including contents that will inculcate the values of peaceful co-existence and social integration into the learners. Social studies is a good subject in this regard. The main purpose of its introduction into the country's educational system is to bring about good and socially competent citizens that would live cordially with the members of the society and contribute individually and collectively to the growth and development of Nigeria (Adesina, 2010). Also, Religious Studies has as one of its major aims, the teaching of religious values which would bring about ideal behaviours among learners. History is essentially taught in schools in order to support learners' understandings of past events, of a place, and person(s) or government with the hope of improving the future (WAEC, 2011; NECO, 2011). Literature teaches many characters with the hope that students would learn lessons and behave ideally in their environments. In fact humanity subjects teach in one form or the other, principles/tenets that can bring about sound knowledge in cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learners for social competency. There had also been expansion of peace education in other school subjects. Along the line, curriculum innovations, conferences, seminars, researches, symposia and discussions at different levels are held periodically.

It is however unfortunate that Nigeria and Nigerians continue to witness incessant rancours, political upheavals, and turbulence at different places including workplaces, The displays of immoral acts capable of triggering off disagreements which can lead to conflicts and social unrest or at worst political disunity are continually present. Such unrest demonstrates why the teaching of existing school subjects and the efforts in our schools are still not enough to train our youths in the country to embrace peaceful and cordial co-existence with one another. Odunewu (2011) opined that the Jos riot which is always between the Muslims and the Christians are historical dating back to 1960. Ekpenyong (2011) explained that Kano riot of 1953 was a bloody uprising between northern youths who were humiliated because of the treatment meted to their leaders in Lagos following a disagreement with the southerners over the desirability of independence for Nigeria in 1956.

Akosile (2011) explained that there is incessant violence across the nation because too many youths are unemployed. Ogunlade (2011) was of the opinion that the Federal Government of Nigeria should be charged to deal decisively with any group or sect working against peace and stability in the country. At the same time, Olutanmole (2011) asserted that radical Islamic sect may cause national disintegration if care is not taken. Also Adewole (1999) wrote concerning the problem of cultism; he posited that a close scrutiny of the menace of secret cult in tertiary institutions in Nigeria obviously indicates an untold

hardship, fear and insecurity to the entire country. Prominent among these misdemeanors are: indiscriminate blood shedding coupled with destruction of properties of cult rivals, innocent students and other members of the community.

Also, social inequalities, low levels of achievement in terms of production and education qualities and the poor orientation witnessed by Nigeria youths amidst anti social values embraced by elders such as the idea of get-rich-quickly schemes which metamorphosed into women trafficking, human rituals, "gbajue", 419 and "yauyau" have all rekindled anxiety, social insecurity, suspicion, acrimony, political offences such as gerrymandering, rigging of elections, use of propaganda, hooliganism and acts of corruption at different levels of government and work places. The high degree of social insecurity in Nigeria calls for a rethinking of our educational values which are not driving home the points that could bring about the inculcation of peace tenets in students.

Peace education and its Justification for Elementary School Children

Peace Education as defined by Oyebamiji (2001) is an instrument per-excellence for the promotion of peace among youths and adult members of any given society. It is systematic acquisition of relevant peace knowledge in our environment and the world around us. Peace Education is essentially the type of education in which learners are taught how to develop senses of maturity in their activities or encounters with people and embrace the principles of cultural relatively and shun cultural ethnocentrism. The development of game spirit and political maturity are essential ingredients' in learning peace tenets. It could however be mentioned that the lack of these qualities in our youths including the elders have had no affect on warring groups like Oodua Peoples' Congress, Arewa Group and the Egbesu Boys. The activities of these ethnic militia groups suggest a serious fear in the peaceful co-existence of Nigeria. These groups have the interest and protection of their ethnic-cultural groups as the foremost objective and not that of the entire country. Their activities dictate without any doubt an erosion of democracy and most importantly lack of patriotism amongst citizens towards the survival of the entire political unity of the country.

Conflicts, misunderstandings, rancours, and the civil war in Nigeria have done serious havoc to the unity of the country. Atanda (2010) listed the effects of conflicts in the home, school, work places, larger communities and among nations as destruction of public properties, disobedience to constituted authorities (social disorder or anarchy), disturbance of social and economic activities and prolonged conflicts which may lead to tribal or civil war. All these have occurred in Nigeria in recent times and especially during the annulment of the 1983 presidential election by the parochial regime of Babangida. The occurrences above are enough for a choice of peace education content in Nigeria.

Peace Education is best introduced to the children if the type of education would achieve its goals. This is supported by the assertion of Oyebamiji (2001 P.1) who wrote that:

"The state of youth violence in our society has reached a stage of an urgent need for appropriate solution if we are to develop our nation. Education is a major agency in the socialization of youths. As such when the younger generation tends to be more deviant, the indication is that something is wrong within the educational system. The present educational system has failed to serve as a means of transmitting the main ingredients of our culture to the younger generations. The need to make education socially relevant cannot be over-emphasized".

Since the youth stage is the common stage where people get involved in crises and conflicts and it is the immediate level of development after childhood, introducing peace tenets to children before developing to

the youth stage would likely be appropriate. Children tend to remember and think fast about what they hear, see and experience. When the ideal in peace education are properly taught, students may likely retain what they learnt and use them in their latter endeavors.

Proposed School Curriculum for Peace Education

Peace Education has not succeeded in getting a place as a school subject in Nigeria although many elites have been clamored for its placement in the school curriculum. UNESCO (1998) Oyebamiji (2001) Osun State Universal Basic Education Board (2010) suggested the teaching of Peace Education in schools. The objectives of Peace Education according to UNESCO recommendations (1981 P. 132); in Odejobi and Adesina (2009) were summarized as:

"Combining learning, training, information and reaction, international education should further the appropriate intellectual and emotional development of the individual. It should develop a sense of social responsibility and of solidarity with less privileged groups and should lead to observance of the principles of equality in everyday conduct. It should also help develop qualities, aptitudes, and abilities which enable the individual to acquire a critical understanding of problems at the national and the international level; to work in a group; to accept and participate in free discussion; and to base value-judgments and decisions on a national analysis of relevant facts and factors".

While bits of peace education can be seen in school, subjects like social studies, history, religious studies and moral education in Nigeria schools, the aspects are not significant enough for achieving the goals of the entire peace education programme. The teaching of the subjects will include the reasons for social imbalance and misunderstandings in Nigeria. In the curriculum for elementary school children, concepts like conflicts, culture, game spirit, political maturity and their effects need to be taught. Among other topics of importance that need to be included in the syllabus are cultural ethnocentrism, cultural relativity tenets, the importance of social values such as the acts of patriotism, endurance, faithfulness, dedication to work, need for self reliance, judicial independence, ethnic militia groups, wars and their effects and the benefits of peaceful co-existence such as growth in all ramifications.

Most importantly, the use of teaching and learning resources such as film trips, video cassette, concrete objects, resource persons and visual and audio visual aids must be paramount. These will arouse the learner's interest to learn and retain facts. The teachers of this subject need to be trained and retrained so that they would be able to teach learners to achieve goals against the conventional teaching and learning processes which encourage the acquisition of knowledge alone (cognitive domain) and places less emphasis on affective domain

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is concluded here that if Peace Education must be given a place in our school curriculum and the tenets of peace must be well framed and properly taught by teachers. If done, Nigeria will hopefully witness a better and peaceful future where good productivity, secured lives and properties and removal of anxieties and political upheavals will be put in place. Children will learn the importance of peace and be encouraged to embrace peace principles as future leaders.

It is however recommended that, the affective domain aspect of education should be given most priority while implementing Peace Education programme. Appropriate inferences, teaching resources and trained teachers for the subject should be given serious attention by the government if it would achieve its goals.

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