
PEACE EDUCATION: A MEANS OF PROMOTING NATIONAL UNITY AND PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE IN NIGERIA

Bolaji. C. AJIBOLA

cbajibola@gmail.com

&

Ifeoma. P. OKAFOR

Ify558@yahoo.com

Department of Social Sciences Education

Faculty of Education,

University of Ilorin, Ilorin

Abstract

Peace is paramount and indispensable in every human society. There can be no sustainable development and progress in any nation where people frequently experience war, destructive conflict and violence. The people in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country like Nigeria need to be united and co-exist peacefully in order to remain an entity that is capable of building a strong and dynamic nation where equality and social justice thrive and people benefit maximally from the available joint resources. To achieve these, people need to understand and tolerate one another in order to avoid unresolved disagreements that can lead to conflicts and violence. This paper discussed the concept of unity, peaceful co-existence, education and peace education. It also explained the need for unity and peaceful co-existence in Nigeria and the role of the family, the school, religious institutions, community leaders and government agencies can play in promoting unity and peaceful co-existence. It was recommended that Peace Education be included in the appropriate school curriculum in Basic, Post Basic, Tertiary and Non-formal Education level of education in Nigeria. The religious and the community leaders should be sensitized on their roles in promoting unity and peaceful co-existence in their various domains through organized workshop and seminars. The government agencies in charge of public enlightenment, in collaboration with the mass media, should educate and sensitize people on the various media in official and local languages on the need and the benefits of living in peacefully and being united and how to prevent and manage disagreement or conflict without resulting into violence.

Keywords: Education, Peace Education, National Unity, Peaceful Co-existence

Introduction

Nigeria is a country in which over 250 ethnic groups with different economic, social, cultural, political and religious background were merged to form one political entity by the British administration in 1914. These ethnic groups despite the uniqueness of their various cultures, have since been bound together to become one nation that is

identified and influenced by common values, common norms and shared common heritage. The over one hundred years of co-existence of the ethnic groups have not been without strife, conflict or violence. The existence had witnessed many political violence, communal conflicts and inter-ethnic violence of various degrees that have led to destruction of properties worth billions of naira, maiming and killing of several innocent citizens because the perpetrators did not imbibe the spirit to peacefully co-exist as one nation in diversity.

Although, conflict is inevitable in a heterogeneous society such as Nigeria, there is the need to promote unity and peaceful co-existence among Nigerians and this can be done through Peace Education. Peaceful co-existence is when there is absence of destructive conflicts that can lead to violence or war in a nation of group of nations. It is very crucial and indispensable to our existence as a nation. There is therefore, the need to inculcate it into all Nigerians so that they can imbibe the collective spirit and unity of purpose that will enable us to put aside our ethnic differences and embrace peace in our domains. Unity and peaceful co-existence are needed for national stability, progress and development because there can be no sustainable development in communities or nations that are characterized with conflicts and violence.

The Concept of Unity and Peaceful Co-existence

Unity connotes making separate parts an entity. It signifies oneness, harmony or singleness of purpose. It is when people of different backgrounds, personalities, or people having different opinions or beliefs cooperate and act together putting aside their differences to further the best interest of the majority. Unity is very vital and the key to growth and sustainable development in multi-ethnic, multi-racial or multi-religious countries. This is because racial discrimination, regionalization and tribalism hinder national unity and it can lead to conflict. Lack of peaceful co-existence is a threat to national unity.

Peaceful co-existence is a global term that is often used to describe the absence of war or a policy of peace between nations of widely differing political and ideologies, especially in the communist and non-communist nations. It is when two or more groups, communities or nations with dissimilar traits or qualities stay together peacefully, harmoniously and work together as one entity for the benefit of all. Peaceful co-existence is important in a nation such as Nigeria because of her heterogeneous political and historical background that made her to be an instrumental state (Albert, 2013). Peaceful co-existence occurs when two or more ethnic groups or nations with different languages, culture, ideologies or religions live, work interact together in the same place, at the same time without any form of unresolved disagreement or conflict that can lead to violence or war. It involves having positive thought, pure feelings, good wishes and healthy relationship that kick out hatred, hostility, conflict or violence in our neighborhoods, communities, nations and the world at large.

The Need for Unity and Peaceful Co-existence in Nigeria

Unity and peaceful co-existence are of paramount importance in any human society. It is the foundation for healthy interpersonal and international relationship and the wheels on which progress, stability and sustainable development revolve; it must therefore be pursued and achieved in every society. The need to teach, preach, sensitize and enlighten people in order to make them ambassadors of peace is becoming more relevant in this 21st century that is characterized with so much violence and war across the globe. There is the need to inculcate into all Nigerians, irrespective of age, gender and home location the importance of unity and peaceful co-existence and how to maintain and sustain it among the different ethnic and religious groups in all parts of Nigeria to prevent the occurrence of ethno-religious conflicts and violence that leads to insecurity.

Nigerians must remain united and peacefully co-exist despite our diversity in order to benefit maximally from our joint wealth and resources that are located in different parts of the country. The presence of the federal government businesses, establishments, institutions, ministries and parastatals in different parts of Nigeria, the federal character and quota system policies made it mandatory for people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds to live and work in communities with different cultures and religions from their own in different parts of the country. There is therefore, the need for people to continue to look beyond ethnic and religious differences to remain united as a nation in order to move the nation forward as an entity.

The fact that Nigeria is an instrumental state necessitates peaceful co-existence. Albert (2013) described an instrumental state as a “society or nation that is formed through aggregation of some contiguous groups into a collective that has a defined territory and some legal rules and national metaphysics which are expected to give people unity of purpose”. There are many communities with different cultures and religious beliefs that are put together to form states and local government for easy political administration in Nigeria. There is therefore the need to peacefully co-exist and be united in order to remain an indivisible entity that is bond by common norms, common values and interest so that they can all maximally benefit from their joint resources.

There are several factors that have been found in literature to be hindering unity and peaceful co-existence in Nigeria and these according to Agbankwuru & Opara (2013), include ethnic prejudice. This is a situation where one prefers and favors people of his or her own ethnic group over people of other ethnic groups. This, according to Eaglesisland Technologies (2012) promotes micro-nationalities instead of the spirit of nationhood. Izsak (2014) mentioned regionalization, tribalism, massive corruption in public places and political instability which comes with rigging general election; United States Institute of Peace (2004) mentioned religion intolerance; Fountain (1999) mentioned structural violence which include: poverty, discrimination and unequal access to opportunities and other forms of injustice inequality in the sharing and distribution of resources, while Malgwa & Amuluche (2013) and the study of Mwaka, Karfa, Musamas & Wambua, (2013) mentioned factors which include; sprouting hatred, string indictment of people of other ethnic or religious background, addressing others with pejorative language and instigating others to do so, using religious language justifications to slander

others, denigrating other people's culture and religion, public name calling, using unguarded utterances that can encourage hatred, violence and conflict that are threat to our unity stability and peaceful co-existence.

Violent conflict has continued to have detrimental effect on communities and nations where it occurs. It has led to insecurity, crippled business, loss of life and properties which had made many people either internally displaced persons in camp or refugees in other countries. Unresolved conflicts and violence have detrimental effects on economic stability and sustainable development. It is also a threat to national unity. Situations and circumstances that can bring about conflict abound but we must learn to resolve our conflict situation amicably without resulting into violence. One way of promoting peaceful co-existence in Nigeria and other parts of the world is through education. It is a viable instrument per excellence for behavioral change and for combating social challenges.

The Concept of Education

Olulube and Egbezor (2002) defined education as the process by which children, youths and adults learn abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which has positive values to the society. Fountain (1999) defined education as any process, whether in school or informal or non-formal education context, that develops in children or adult the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values leading to behavioral changes. Education can also be described as the process that enables the individual to acquire the desirable behaviour, right attitudes, positive values, in addition to knowledge and skills needed to be functional members of the society. Unity and peace co-existence are of inestimable value in Nigeria. They are well echoed in the overall philosophy of Nigeria and this is stipulated in the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) and these include:

1. Living in unity and harmony as one indivisible, indissoluble, democratic and democratic and sovereign nation founded on principle of freedom, equality and justice;
2. Promoting inter African solidarity and world peace through understanding.

Education is the tool that can be used to achieve the aims, objectives and the overall philosophy of Nigeria. It can promote unity and harmonious living in the society by making the recipients understand and tolerate differences in other people's culture, religion, personal values and belief system (Fountain, 1999). Education is a tool that can be used to engrave into the heart and mind of man the right attitude, right behaviour, thereby correcting or changing negative or wrong behaviour, wrong opinions, and wrong ideologies. It can be used to define the behavioural pattern of the society, build attitudes and mold the behaviour of the society according to the shared culture of the society (Eaglesland Technologies, 2012). It also helps the individual to integrate and contributes positively to the society in which they belong. Graca-Micheal cited in Fountain (1999) opined that both the content and the process of education should promote peace, justice, respect for human right and acceptance of responsibility, in

addition to skill of negotiation, problem solving, critical thinking and communication that will enable them to resolve conflict without resulting into violence.

In imparting knowledge that can change wrong behaviour, opinion and ideas, all the agent of socialization such as family, school, mass media, community leaders, religious organization and even government agencies need to be involved. Fountain (1999) opined that behavior does not occur in vacuum, it is nested within the context of family, peer group, the community and the larger society. This indicates that the agent of socialization significantly influence individuals violent behaviour in any given context. It is equally important to involve other agents of socialization because education does not only take place in the four walls of the classroom and does not end there. It is a continuous process that can be effectively carried out by the various agents of socialization especially when combating societal challenges. It can be used to inculcate into the individual the need and how to live peacefully in a community where they reside. Education is a tool for achieving peace in Nigeria and in all countries of the world. It is also the viable tool that can be used to achieve unity and peaceful co-existence.

The Concept of Peace and Peace Education

Peace connotes a state of quietness, calmness, tranquility and freedom from hatred, hostility, conflict and all forms of violence (Oyebanji, 2001). Alaku (2014) described peace as a process that helps to eliminate war, fear, suffering, pervasive poverty, oppression by the rich, police brutality and intimidation of the ordinary people by those in power or by some section in the society. Peace is a desirable virtue that is worth striving for. It is a fundamental precondition for societal stability, national unity and development and it is a product of understanding, tolerance, equality and social justice. It is a virtue that needs to be taught, learned and practiced in all societies. It is desirable and important to teach and acquire knowledge about what peace is, what brings about peace, what damages it and how to maintain peace in our families, educational institutions, communities, nation and in the entire world (Alaku, 2104). There is therefore the need to teach and learn about Peace Education in our society.

Peace Education is defined in UNICEF (2011) as the:

process of promoting the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to bring about behavioural changes that will enable children, youth and adults to prevent conflict and violence both overt and structural, to resolve conflict peacefully and to create the conditions conducive to peace whether in an interpersonal, intergroup, national and international levels.

Harris & Synott (2002) defined peace education as a series of ‘teaching encounters’ that draw people from their desire for peace, non-violent alternative for managing conflict and the skill for critical analysis of structural arrangement that

produces and legitimizes injustice and inequality. It is the process of acquiring the values, knowledge and developing attitudes, skills and behaviour to live in harmony with oneself and with the natural environment.

The aim of peace Education according to Van Slyck, Shem & Elbedeour (1999), is to alter beliefs, attitudes and behaviour from negative to positive towards conflicts as a basis for preventing violence. It ensures that people with different background and characteristics live and interact peacefully in a patriotic and nationalistic atmosphere (Mwaka, Karfa, Musamas & Wambua, 2013). Fountain (1999) opined that Peace Education must promote harmonious interpersonal, national, and international relationship and address prevention and resolution of all forms of conflict and violence whether overt or structural. Peace Education programmes centers on conflict resolution, symptoms of conflict, and techniques for resolving interpersonal dispute among others. There is urgent need to teach Nigerians citizens Peace Education both within and outside the formal school system of education to enable all citizens, irrespective of age, gender and home location, become peace ambassadors wherever they go and live. This can only be possible if all the agents of education and socialization are involved in the process of teaching and learning peace education.

The Role of Agents of Socialization in Imparting Peace Education

Having opportunity to acquire Peace Education is important in every society. It has the ability to make the individuals agent of peace wherever they find themselves. Teaching and learning about peace is not limited to school alone, all other agents of socialization such as family, school, mass media, community leaders, religious organization and government agencies must all be involved in imparting Peace Education to people within their reach.

The school should be responsible for inculcating in the learners the right attitude, right behaviour and values that are needed for peaceful living within the society and method of resolving conflict that can threaten peaceful co-existence of the various ethnic composition of Nigeria. Peace Education should be included in the appropriate curriculum such as civic education, social studies and religious studies curriculum in basic and post basic levels of education and in the curriculum of general studies in tertiary institution in order to instill the virtue of tolerance and peaceful co-existence in learners in formal education systems. Peace Education should be included in Non-formal Basic Education curriculum to allow the adult learners to learn about peace, how to maintain peace and resolve conflicts that can lead to breakdown of law and order in their communities.

The family as the primary agents of socialization must be sensitized to rise to the task of teaching their members about peace and how to live peacefully within the families, neighborhoods and their communities and how to resolve conflicts amicably without resulting to violence in case there is any disagreement. The children should learn from their parents how to live peacefully with other family members, neighbourhoods and the community members. Parents should serve as model to their children. When

children see that their parents always resolve disagreement amicably, they will also learn to do so because children learn by imitation.

Religious institution, through the religious leaders, should preach and teach their members peace, love, tolerance, respect for human lives and other positive values that can enhance peace and stability within the communities, the nation and the world at large. They should teach their members how to maintain peace, prevent religious conflicts and how to resolve conflicts amicably in case of any. They should not string indictment of people of other ethnic or religious background or instigate their followers to do so. They should desist from using religious languages to slander people of other faith or religion.

The traditional rulers should strive to maintain peace and harmonious living within their communities. They should discourage ethnic sentiments that can lead to conflict. They should teach their subjects on the need and how to maintain peace, how to prevent communal clashes; inter-tribal and indigenes and settlers conflicts in fairness. They should enlighten their subjects on how to resolve conflicts amicably without resulting to violence in case of disagreement.

The government, through its agencies such as National Orientation Agency, in collaboration with the media houses, should sensitize and educate the masses through the various media in official and the local languages and other medium through which the masses can be reached on the need for unity and peaceful co-existence in Nigeria and in the world at large. They should sensitize the masses on issues that can promote unity and peaceful co-existence, factor that can militate against it and the various methods of preventing and resolving conflict in our society. The media should promote peace, love, tolerance, respect for human lives and other positive value that can help in achieving the philosophy of living in unity and harmony as one indivisible and indissoluble democratic sovereign nation founded on the principle of freedom, equality and justice (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013), through drama, songs, talkshows and news that promote unity and peaceful co-existence.

Conclusion

There is no society that can develop and progress in an environment that lacks peace and unity. Therefore, no amount of money or effort to ensure that people are educated and sensitized on issues of unity and peaceful co-existence in Nigeria is too much. The need to educate Nigerians how to maintain and sustain unity and peaceful co-existence through Peace Education cannot be overemphasized.

Recommendations

In order to promote unity and peaceful co-existence in Nigeria, the following recommendations are put forward:

1. Peace Education should be infused into the curriculum at the basic, post basic, tertiary and non-formal education level of education.
2. The religious and community leaders should sensitized on their role in promoting peace in their various domains through organized workshop and seminars. They

should be encouraged to teach or educate their followers on how to live peacefully and harmoniously with other people that are not from their community or religious sect.

3. The government agencies in charge of public enlightenment, in collaboration with the mass media, should educate and sensitize people on the various media in official and local languages on the need and the benefits of peace and unity, how to prevent and manage conflict without resulting to violence or war and other aspect of Peace Education.

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