THE ROLE OF CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN STEMMING ETHNIC CONFLICT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examines through theoretical framework, the role of citizenship education in stemming ethnic conflict in Nigeria. Nigeria, one of the most populous nations in Africa is benighted with ethnic conflict of various shades and dimension. This has placed the nation at the precipice of collapse. In order to avert this unpleasant consequence, citizenship education has an inevitable role of stemming ethnic conflicts in a plural nation such as Nigeria. Citizenship education is a watershed for harmonizing synchronizing the various ethnic groups with attendant centrifugal and centripetal forces into national unity. The citizens are exposed to the need of harmonious coexistence, rather than ethnic strife and cleavages. This paper X-rayed the concepts of conflict, ethnicity and citizenship education. The group theory was adopted in explaining the actions of the various ethnic groups, in their quest for authoritative allocation of values. It also harps on group theory and prebendal politics. The role of citizenship education in Nigeria was extensively discussed. It finally ends on the indispensability of citizenship education as a veritable instrument for stemming ethnic in Nigeria.

Introduction

The issue of citizenship education is central to the process of harmonious living in a plural nation, such as Nigeria. Therefore, it has attracted the intellectual and practical attention of scholars within the scholarship world of public administration, political, education etc. The aftermath of the foregoing is that there has been an upsurge in the interest of scholars in citizenship education. This stems from the fact that Nigeria, being the largest democracy in Africa, is benighted with an avalanche of ethnic conflicts. The prevalence of ethnic conflict is a matter of grave concern and it requires a recast.

According to Boer (2001), "Nigeria appears to be a nation in chaos, a nation on the brink of her precipice. Here lies the utility of citizenship education. It has the capability of stemming ethnic conflicts. It is a watershed for harmonizing the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. Since citizenship education relies heavily on communication to disseminate information. The various ethnic groups in the course of interacting see themselves as one, though tribe and tongue may differ.

According to Ókosun V. (2001), citizenship education galvanizes and cements the actions of the various centrifugal and centripetal forces into national unity and ethnic harmony. Given this premise, this paper examines through theoretical review the role of citizenship education in stemming ethnic conflicts in Nigeria.

The paper is divided into section beginning with an introduction: Section two deal with clarification of the concept of citizenship education, ethnicity. It also deals with theoretical framework. In this chapter, the author will examine the group theory or approach. Section three takes a look at citizenship education as a veritable tool for stemming ethnic conflict. Here emphasis will be orchestrated on the various ways citizenship education will galvanize and stimulate harmonious living amongst ethnic groups in Nigeria. This part ends with a concluding remark on the indispensability of citizenship. The essence is to reduce conflict for ethnic conflict have endangered hate and division among our people and undermines the prospect of the long term stability and unity of our country, (quoted in Frances Deng Kimaro el al. (1996).

Citizenship Education

Various scholars have defined the concept of citizenship education in their own way. In other words, there are plethora of definitions. There is no one single definition. These definitions are seen from their perception of the concept.

According to Osakwe (1994), citizenship education is that type of education that provides the individual the opportunity of training, to know one right, privilege, duties and responsibility. He stressed further by harping on the fact that the main goal of citizenship education is the development of a strong sense of responsibility, for socializing and integrating the individual towards societal norm and values.

A synthesis of Osakwe definition, will bring to limelight that the objective of the current national policy of education is embedded in it. Thus, Osakwe definition is a mixgril. Mixgril in the sense that it streamlined the objectives of the national policy on education with the goal of citizenship education into one straight jacket.
The goals of the national policy on education are as follows viz:

1. Inculcation of national consciousness and national unity.
2. Inculcation of the right type of values and attitude for the survival of the individuals in the society.
3. The training of the individual in the understanding of the world around them.

Uwagie Ero (2001), opined that the concept of citizenship education refers to the type of education, in which the students are exposed to the fundamentals of social responsibility, via the knowledge of rights, obligation, national ethnics and discipline. A microscopic view of the above definition will reveal the fact that it tally with the contention of Osakwe. Both definitions have a common denominator, which is the special responsibility. Both author agreed that the essence of citizenship education is to orientate and mobilize the entire citizenry, towards national unity, irrespective of the ethnic group one belong. It is geared towards national cohesion and integration. Rather than fanning the embers of ethnic jingolism/conflict and cleavages which are reoccurring decimal in "Nigeria political landscape.

Conceptual Clarification

Conflict

In order for us to grasp the impact of this concept fully, it is imperative to pause a while and analyze the concepts of ethnic and conflict.

According to Golwa (2001), conflicts are derivable from the possession of and pursuit of divergent ideas, goals, claims, interest and aspiration. Conflict is a situation in which two or more human beings desire goals, which they perceive as being obtainable by one or the other, but not both. This compact definition can be open out and clarified by saying that, there must be at least two parties. Each party is mobilizing energy to obtain a goal, a desired objective situation and each party perceived the other as barriers or threat to that goal (quoted in Michael C. R. 1991).

A look at this definition of Golwa, will bring to limelight that this definition is broader in that the action of both the actors and managers in a situation of conflict is embedded in it.

Onigu Otite (2000), contend that conflict is a struggle over values and claims to scare status, power and resources in which the aim of the opponent are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals. Thus in the quest for power, people may resort to struggling among themselves for the scare authoritative allocation of values which are limited in supply. This may degenerate into conflict among the contending groups.

In these definitions stated above, there is a common indices that is conflict take in different situation. These situations differ from one nation to the other, "depending on the zone of contagion" (Bob Osaze, 2001). The bottom line is this, in a given situation, two or more social entities or power are involved and they see themselves as possessing mutually incompatible goals.

Ethnicity

There are various definitions of the concept ethnic groups; in other words, various scholars have postulated different definitions of the term ethnicity, for the purpose of this paper the writer shall adopt the term ethnicity and ethnic group to mean one and the same thing. These definitions of scholars depend on their ideological prism, from which they view the concept. The main contending schools of thought are the Liberalist and the Marxist school of thought.

According to Dunmoye (2001), a major distinguishing characteristic if the two schools is the conceptual indeterminess as to whether one used the term tribe, tribalism or ethnic group. On the other hand, the Marxist repudiated the term tribe or tribalism calling it pejorative and illusory. Nnoli O (1987), throws more light into the polenics regarding tribe or ethnic groups among the liberalist and Marxist scholar. He waters it down by equating tribalism with ideology and ethnicity with science.

Mair (1962), a distinguishing scholar who belongs to the liberal school of thought defined ethnic group as a people sharing the same historical experience, having the same culture, speaking the same language and sharing the same belief about the future together. Using this definition as a parameter, we can refer to the Yoruba, Ibibios, the Edos', the Igboas as ethnic group, since they possess the attributes outlined by Main Mitchell (1974), a prolific writer, who belongs to the liberal school of thought contend that ethnicity or ethnic group are inevitable consequence of modernization, economic development, and political development, especially in Africa. This definition is condensed in that; it clearly revealed the fact that ethnicity or ethnic group evolved due to political development that takes place in a nation.

The major landmark of Mitchell definition, is its ability to use both concepts of tribe and ethnic group, while he agreed to the fact that there are inherent differences between the two concepts. The differences may be due to customs, religious, belief or practices that are identified characteristics of a group.
Nnoli (1987), a scholar who belong to the Marxist school of thought, defined ethnicity "as an element of superstructure of society, ethnic consciousness can only be a major significance in the social process to the extent that it is congruent with the production relations, which form the superstructure. Nnoli, debunked the view that ethnicity is not as essential element in the superstructure, rather it is a reactionary way of stemming revolution through this process, the rich will continue to exploit other social classes for their selfish end. "The elite often manipulate the proletariat in their quest for political power.

Ethnicity has the capacity of generating conflict in a given nation, such as Nigeria. They express itself in form of cleavages among the various groups. In such crises situation the rich always benefit. This is due to the fact that in situation of conflict, revolution is a far cry. The people cannot present a united front in changing the quo conflicts occur due to hatred and animosity arising from stiff completion from scarce resources in a plural society. "For one ethnic group is quite aware of what other group is doing” (Heinz Weihrich Koontz, 2003).

Theoretical Framework

Theories are expected to aid our understanding, explanation and prediction of conflict phenomena. In fact theories are the building block of any meaningful research. In this paper, the group theory will be utilized. This framework captures lucidly the dynamic relationship between the various ethnic groups in Nigeria, with the attendant centripetal and centrifugal forces.

According to Harry Barry (1962), "Group theory sees politics as the process by which social values are authoritatively allocated. This is done by decisions. The decisions are produced by activities. Each activity is not something separate from every other, but masses of activity that have common tendencies in regard to decisions. These masses of activity are grouped so the struggle between groups determines what decisions are made by the government. Extrapolating this definition to Nigeria situation, it can be explained that the various ethnic groups see themselves as distinct from the other; however they interact and relate to one another. In the process of interaction, they make claim on themselves and the government. Theses interaction leads to stiff competition. These competition, interaction and struggle result in various policies when articulated by the conversion process.

According to Ikelegbe A. O. (1996), the various groups have diverse ways of ensuring that their interest and objectives are taken care of. To ensure their influences, the group maintains access to the key point of decision making in government institution, such as the legislative, judiciary and executive arm of government. They are often vociferous in their demand. Sometimes the activities of these groups generate conflict and cleavages. This lead to ethnic clashes, as epitomized in the Zango Kataf, Aguleri/Umuleri, Idi Araba (Lagos), Ife/Modakeke conflict. The echo and reverberation of these clashes can better be imagined than being described.

It is pertinent to mention that though these conflicts among the various groups leave a bitter taste in the mouth, with the attendant conflagration. The Federal Government always checkmates these ethnic clashes. There are equally other groups which are overlapping in nature in terms of membership. The various competing groups and the unorganized interest tend to act as a "safety value" to the unbecoming and belligerent attitude of some ethnic groups.

The Role of Citizenship Education in Stemming Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria

Education and society are conterminous, that is in every society education is expected to play the vital role of ensuring that "culture of that society is preserved and passes to the new generation". Here lies the utility of citizenship education as a veritable instrument of ensuring social order and peaceful coexistence amongst the entire citizenry in Nigeria.

Citizenship education has a positive and decisive role to play in stemming ethnic conflict in Nigeria. This is so, considering the fact that various factors have been fingered, as responsible for the avalanche of conflict and cleavages in Nigeria. The plethora of conflicts as expressed in the southwest zone, north central zone, south-south zone, North West and southwest zones leaves no one in doubt. That there is urgent need for these shades of conflict to be reduce to the barest minimum, via the teaching of citizenship education.

Ross (1993), contend that conflict are about the concrete interest of adversaries pursue and at the same about the interpretation of what are at stake in a dispute. An extrapolation of Ross's contention, will bring to limelight that these conflicts which he mentioned can be simmered down through the teaching of citizenship education. The adults/students and the general public are admonished to imbibe the virtue, ethos and norms of the society. It provides the necessary ingredients for living decently in Nigeria, irrespective of the ethnic group one hails from.

Citizenship education has the merit of not only stimulating unity, but equally galvanizing the
people to live in peace and concord with each other, rather than resorting to violence and brig and age that is in vogue in Nigeria.

This agrees with the postulation of Uwagie Ero (2003), that these shades of ethnic crises, which have drawn the nation to its nadir of her reputation, can be simmered through the teaching of citizenship education. To this end, teachers at the primary schools and lecturers at the tertiary institutions should emphasize the principle of live and let live, rather than live and let's die that tend to create conflict flash points and epicenters.

Citizenship education is a watershed, in that it has the capacity to harness various conflicts that pervade Nigeria's political landscape into a basin of harmonious and peace loving nation. There is so particularly with globalization gaining currency among the comity of nations. Nigeria, the so called giant of Africa cannot afford to lag behind. Kwasi Abougye (2001), see globalization on as a linking of people of the world together in a kind of global village, where we will be much interconnected both in the fulfillment of our need and sharing of the world's resources. If Nigeria is to gain maximally from the wind of globalization then the nation must jettison ethnic conflicts and extend the olive branch to one another. For it is only through this medium that peace can prevail. This will encourage investors and the much needed scientific and technological transfer to come in and have a foothold in Nigeria. This has the capacity of ushering Nigeria into an industrialized and advanced nation. Through the teaching of citizenship education, students are empowered to have peace, love and progress as their credo, whenever they find themselves in Nigeria.

**Strategies for Teaching Citizenship Education**

In teaching citizenship education with a view of stemming ethnic conflict in Nigeria, the following strategies need to be adopted:

a. Dramatization method.

b. Simulation technique.

c. Role playing.

d. Moral dilemma exercise.

e. Project.

f. Excursion cum field trips.

g. Symposia, seminars and workshops. This should be done both at the local, state and national level. Nigerians of proven character and men of consequence should be invited to give a talk on various topics. These topics must on various ways of stemming ethnic conflicts in Nigeria. Emphasis must be laid of the gains of living in ethnic harmony, rather than ethnic disharmony.

h. Group discussion among students. During this discussion, the student should be told by the lecturers that they have a part to play in the realization of national unity. They need to imbibe national values ethos. They need to sharpen their communication skills. This will enable them to play useful roles in the society. In addition to this, the student must be taught that no particular ethnic group should feel superior to the other, no matter its population or wealth.

**Recommendations**

1. This paper suggests that the government must provide a favourable political atmosphere for peace and concord to reign among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria.

2. There is the urgent need for the government to de-emphasize prebendal politics in Nigeria. This will reduce avarice. Looting unbridle corruption and mismanagement of our nation resources by the elite and political class for their selfish ends. Our motto and watch word shall be "Service to Humanity".

3. Federal, State, and Local Government should put in place adequate machinery to ameliorating poverty in Nigeria. It has been revealed that poverty is the main cause of prebendal politic and the attendant effect of ethnic clashes. If the vast majority of Nigeria are living above poverty line and well educated, the political elites cannot use them as cannon fodders for their selfish end.

4. Government should encourage and orchestrate tourism culture amongst Nigerians. Achibong (2004) put forward a suggestion or canvasses that exchange of tourism has the potential of curbing ethnic conflict in Nigeria. Though we are not the only people in the world faced with such problems, but over preventive and effective management of conflict lack creativity.
Conclusion

Citizenship education is a veritable tool for achieving unity, most especially in a variegated country such as Nigeria. Our nation is being plagued by ethnic conflicts of various shades and dimension. The attendant effects are brigandage, conflagration, leading to loss of life and wanton destruction of properties. This cannot be allowed to continue unabated. Here lies the utility of citizenship education. It has the capacity of stemming ethnic conflict in Nigeria. These conflicts among ethnic groups can be simmered down through the teaching of citizenship education. Through it student and the generality of the populace are admonished to imbibe peace, harmony, concord irrespective of the ethnic group they come from.

References


