

The Role of Multicultural Education in the Promotion of National Unity in Nigeria

EKURI Patrick George¹, Essien Ekpenyong Essien² & Michael Obi ODEY³

Department of Social Studies and Civic Education, University Calabar,
Calabar, Cross River State

¹ekuripato@gmail.com, ²essienekpenyong73@gmail.com

³odeyobi@yahoo.com

DOI:[10.56201/jhsp.vol.11.no3.2025.pg170.174](https://doi.org/10.56201/jhsp.vol.11.no3.2025.pg170.174)

Abstract

The peace and stability of a nation is dependents on the county's effort in harmonizing the values and norms of the diverse cultural groups into a unified political entity. It is on this bases that this paper assesses the role of multicultural education in promoting national unity in Nigeria. The paper posited that multicultural education encourages critical thinking and problem-solving skills in the learner which can lead to a deeper understanding of complex issues and the development that can be applied to real-world situations. The paper also reviews the challenges hindering the achievement of multicultural education objectives. However, the paper concluded that multicultural education bothers on issues of cross-cultural and intercultural integration and is germane when considering dialogue on national unity.

Keywords: Multicultural Education, National Unity, Promotion, Role, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria as a country achieved her independence from the British colonial master more than 61 years ago, the agenda of unity is still a top priority due to its important role in the development of the nation. The ability of each country to be independent and progress politically, socially and economically depends on the social harmony and political stability that can only be achieved through unity among its citizens, especially for a nation with a multicultural community as well diverse ethnic groups and several languages (Egan, 2021). Nigeria is a nation with a population of various ethnic groups.

According to the Population Census Nigeria (2006), the total population is 140.18 million, while United Nations population estimate of 2023 projected that Nigeria population to be 2220 million with 3 major ethnic and over 250 minority ethnic groups. Due to such a population landscape the process of unity in a Nigerian society is so important (Akporehe & Osiobe, 2021). With the geometrical in the Nigeria population and the attendant agitation for secession, the government approaches such as military incursion and national dialogue may be expedient as an immediate solution, a more comprehensive approach that is grassroots and inclusive is antidote like multicultural education to the anomalies currently taking place in the country is required.

Multiculture is a term that is coined from multi and culture. Multi means many or more than one, while culture is a way of life of a people embracing food, dressing, religion, marriage, beliefs and others. Samuel (2021) defined culture as learned and shared human patterns or models for living day-to-day living patterns. Multicultural education therefore provides education that is inclusive taking into consideration the kaleidoscope of learners. Unity is a quality of being in one

accord or harmony. Multicultural education is therefore aimed at fostering unity and peace in a country by critically examining, respecting, adapting and socializing with other people's culture in order to create harmonious relationship with each other (Egan, Adamu and Oni, 2017). Formal education is therefore a veritable channel for transmitting cultural values through various subjects taught.

The Role of Multicultural Education in Promoting National Unity

Multicultural education has numerous roles to play in promoting unity in diversity in country like Nigeria (Aziz, NazKhan, Rahman, & Muhammad, 2021). One of the primary roles is the promotion of cultural awareness and respect for diversity. Multicultural education helps youths understand and appreciate the cultural differences of their peers, which can lead to greater empathy and tolerance. This can also help reduce prejudice, discrimination and cultural ethnocentrism, which can negatively impact the economic and social development of the nation.

Multicultural education also provides equal opportunities for all students. It helps educators recognize the strengths and abilities of all students, regardless of their cultural background (Essien & Ohanyere, 2023). This recognition can lead to higher expectations for students' academic performance and provide opportunities for them to succeed. Additionally, multicultural education can help close the achievement gap between students from different cultural backgrounds.

Another benefit of multicultural education is the promotion of critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Aziz, Haque & Mahmood, 2017). Multicultural education encourages its beneficiaries to examine societal issues from multiple perspectives and to challenge their own biases and assumptions. This can lead to a deeper understanding of complex issues and the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills that can be applied to real-world situations.

Moreover, multicultural education being an aspect of social studies education contributes in the attainment of national goals through citizenship education. Citizenship education refers to the culture of certain behaviours, knowledge outlooks and values which are found in the culture the individual participates (Yakubu & Sadiq, 2018). A citizen however, is one who conforms to certain accepted practices, holds a particular belief that is loyal to certain values, participates in certain activities and conforms to norms which are often local in character. On the other hand, it contributes in making citizens understand the diversity among the people of Nigeria, and further leads them to see the cooperation and later dependence among them which are among the major elements of nation building (Essien, Ohayere, Wali & Fyentirimam, 2023). It further plays the role of making the people appreciate and respect the cultural diversity of Nigeria and to realize the need for cooperation, tolerance, unity and people in the country (Sheshi, 2022).

Multicultural education can contribute to national peace and unity as it can bring about acculturation; tolerance; religious cohesion and dissolves the impact of ethnocentric tendencies (Edinyang & Opoh, 2014). The multicultural nature of the Nigerian society makes it imperative 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. While acknowledging globalization as instrument of cultural integration, Nigeria will take a cue from China. According to Samuel (2020), China's 5,000 years of history and culture included contacts with foreigners and foreign culture but adapted foreign cultural influences rather than assimilated them.

Akporehe and Osiobe (2021) in an article titled 'Multicultural education as a tool for fostering peace and unity' used the Allport 1954 Intergroup Contact Theory to illustrate the role of

multinational education in peace building and the impact of the spirit of unity among members of a community with divisive tendency. The authors presume that Intergroup Contact Theory is built on the premises that under appropriate conditions interpersonal contact is one of the most effective ways to reduce prejudice between majority and minority group members. Akporehe and Osiobe (2021) noted that if one has the opportunity to communicate with others, they are able to understand and appreciate different points of views involving their way of life. As a result of new appreciation and understanding, prejudice should diminish. Issues of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination are commonly occurring issues between rival groups. Allport's proposal was that properly managed contact between the groups should reduce these problems and lead to better interactions. The gains of multicultural education may not be immediate but over the years' attitudes, values may be redressed.

Challenges Hindering the Achievement of Multicultural Education Objectives

The national policy on education (2014) seems not to have addressed issues bothering on multicultural education that are germane to attain the much-desired unity in the face of uncertainty in the nation. Using language as an example, one wonders if the schools implement the policy fully and if there are teachers to teach Social Studies in Nigerian languages in different geographical zones of the country. It is a known fact that in Cross River state for example, no major Nigeria language is used to teach Social Studies in the Junior secondary school level.

Although multicultural education is carried out in such subjects like Social Studies, it stops at basic education. What this paper is advocating is extending multicultural education in form of Social Studies compulsorily at the senior secondary level of education which is a critical stage of youth development. Thus, at senior secondary and even tertiary education, multicultural education in form of Social Studies, Nigerian language and other aspects of our national life must be taught as core subjects and also, be integrated into all courses. The constants encounter of multicultural tenets in any level of education may likely promote national unity and peace in the long run.

CONCLUSION

The paper concluded that multicultural education bothers on issues of cross-cultural and intercultural integration and is germane when considering dialogue on national unity. Although, every child born Nigeria is born into a particular ethnic with a defined culture, it can be modified, bad aspect discarded and enculturation can take place to suit prevailing circumstances. Multiculturalism is about challenging everyone academically; ending segregated programmes; valuing differences, and recognizing all cultures as significant in the mainstream curriculum.

As Nigeria prepares for the National Youth Conference, it hoped that stakeholders in education and indeed Nigerians will take multiculturalism in front burner of achieving unity in Nigeria. Social Studies educators owe this generation a duty to culturally integrate the children and dissolve ethnocentric vices, religious intolerance, hatred, greed and so on that are currently tearing the nation apart by integrating multicultural values into school curriculum. In the same vein, the society, family, religious bodies must teach virtues that accentuate peace and unity of the country.

WAYFORWARD

1. Curriculum planning of content should include multicultural features such as food, dressing, festivals, language, religion among others. The school activities have to be coordinated to prevent ethnicity, prejudice, hatred and other vices.
2. Curriculum content of multicultural education should embrace the following: Creating learning goals and objectives that incorporate multicultural aspect, such as developing

students' ability to write persuasively about social justice concerns; using a frequency matrix to ensure that the teacher includes a wide variety of ethnic groups in a wide variety of ways in curriculum materials and instructional activities; introducing different ethnic groups and their contributions on a rotating basis; including several examples from different ethnic experiences to explain subject matter concepts, facts and skills; and showing how multicultural concepts, goals and activities intersect with subject-specific curricular standards.

References

- Akporehe, D. & Osiobe, C. (2021). Multicultural education as a tool for fostering peace and unity. *The Journal of Multiculturalism in Education*, 8(1), 1-17.
- Aziz, M. F., Haque, A., & Mahmood, A. (2017). An empirical study of entrepreneurial intent: An application on business graduates of Sultanate of Oman. *Research Journal of Social Science and Management*, 7(5), 13-21.
- Aziz, M. F., Naz, F. L., Khan, F. U., Rahman, F., & Muhammad, W. (2021). Towards a culture of inclusion: A study of ethnic diversity and intercultural tolerance. *Humanities and Social Sciences Reviews*, 9(2), 734- 740. <https://doi.org/10.18510/hssr.2021.9272>.
- Egan, H. E. (2021). Conceptual framework of Social Studies moral values and potentials of addressing moral failure in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Social Studies and Civic Education*, 24 (2), 312-328. <http://www.njss.org.ng>
- Egan, H. E., Adamu, I. M. & Oni, O. F. (2017). Political socialization and youth participation in Nigerian democracy: A gain or lost?. *Social Science and the Challenges of Democracy in Nigerian*, 1 (1), 78-83.
- Essien, E. E. & Ohanyere, C. C. (2023). Cultural pluralism and equality: A precursor for the development of Nigerian educational system. *Prestige Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 6(1), 192-204.
- Essien, E. E., Ohayere, C. C., Wali, C. R., & Fyentirimam, D. (2023). Education and social reconstruction: Mechanism for building a peaceful society in Nigeria. *Research Journal's Journal of Education*, 2(5), 1-7.
- Samuel, H. (2020). Ethnic diversity: National unity and multicultural education in China. Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond. USA: David Publication.
- Sheshi, M. (2022). Citizenship education: A panacea for national consciousness and sustainable democracy in Nigeria. A paper presented at the 7th Annual National Conference of Federal College of Education, Kontagora.
- Yakubu, A. S. & Sadiq, I. (2018). Culture for national integration: Social studies education perception. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Research Development*, 28 (1), 1-10.