Teaching and Learning in a Multi-Religious Nigeria: A Sociological Viewpoint

Abstract

The main thrust of this paper is to examine teaching and learning in a multi-religious Nigeria: A Sociological Viewpoint. The paper conceptualises teaching and learning, the importance attached to education and the factors that hinder and promote teaching and learning in multi-religious societies. Religion was conceptualised, and the major types of religious group in Nigeria are stated. The National Policy on Education is used as a reference for the provision of education, in multi-religious Nigeria. Lastly, some recommendations were proffered among which is , all schools should have regard and consideration for religious differences with a view to imbibe the culture of respect for other peoples religions and to promote religious tolerance in Nigeria, this is by providing for every child of any religion a religious teacher regardless of the number of the student in attendance.

Introduction

Education is as old as human society. Teaching and learning predates the history of formal schooling, modern economic institutions and the advanced political structure of states. The existing features of society are feasible in nature, but the disarray, here is that religious beliefs of societies are more of the unseen. This engaged mankind's particular affection, attention, attitude, aptitude and knowledge towards Deities. With the coming of modern ideas, man struggle out to science, technology and design a code of conduct for morality. These are represented by the built and inbuilt concepts of school, schooling and learning as no society operates under the premises of amorality. The aspects and processes that involve teaching and learning are diversified to meet the complexity of societies. The multiple and diversified nature of man's society, resulted to religious multiplication and deities proliferation, where some are represented as animals, some as

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humans; while others as imaginary beings. This belief is the gradual migration toward the spiritual component of ultimate reality of the unity of the Deities involved.

According to Ornstein and Levine (2003) teaching and learning in a multi-religious society is a complex whole of itself. Teaching is complex, social in nature and dynamic in its contents. A multi-religious society is having various and diversified interests and requires highly social integration to promote the various concepts in their social existence. To Schaefer (2005), teaching, learning and religious institutions are integral components of integrating the social functions of the social system. Ofuebe (2001) elucidates that, school as a sub-system carried out the obligation of maintaining and preserving the norms, values and ideologies of society which are contents of school curriculum in subjects, like History, government, civic education, religious studies and languages.

To have a successful teaching and learning in a multi-religious society like Nigeria is to have a federal system of schooling policies and unity in curriculum contents. Aggarwal (2007) posits that, the aim of federalism is the unity in education system, by using one curriculum and a uniform teaching, learning and instructional pedagogies. Nigeria identifies three major religious groups: Islam, Christianity, Traditional religion and many sects of these religions. In policies therefore, social, economic and political ideas of federalism claim the best stand, and here we are, in unity of schooling curriculum through the National policy on education. In respect to the multi-religious factor of Nigeria, the government provided opportunities for every religion to gain from the national policy on Education, for example, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004,p.6) maintains that, the philosophy of Nigeria education includes to,

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

These facts build up the components of Nigeria in building and providing suitable curriculum for the nation as a multi-religious society. The unity therefore, is strongly built in the National Policy on Education.

Theoretical Framework

Theory is abstract in nature but explains how certain things happen or are in the present situation of study. Marshall (2006) posits that, theory is an account of the world which we cannot see or measure. These things might be events and. social factors resulting from social facts in society. The study of social factors in societies is dynamic and this dynamism is as a result of differences in the perception of individual. Sociologists and Sociologists of Education have observed that the entire social system is a combination of various sub-systems, among which are; education, polity, economy, family and religion, base on the functionalist perspective, these structures influence education (Mahuta, 2007). The theories that are used to observe the social systems remain the sociological theories that are objective use study society, teaching and learning in multi-religious societies. Questioning, researching and assumption are important aspects of sociologists of education, as they question conventional wisdom, so as to prove fact and conclude based on authenticity. Shepard and Greene (2001) posit that, a perspective is a particular point of view, but sociological perspective never focuses on the individual. The view through sociological lens always remains at the social, or group level. Sociological theory has the power of predictions and prohibitions, due to its

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strength and nature. It equally will tell what will not, due to reasons, resources and based on positive assumption and verification of theoretical evidence, in a comprehensive manner using social facts.

In a related view Shepard and Greene (2001) argued that, religion is concerned with sacred things. Sociologists are not interested in the spiritual side of any religion or patterns of beliefs, but they focus on social aspects of religion that can be measured and be observed as they are related to teaching and learning. The theory that is used to study teaching and learning is equally applicable to religion. Sociologists of education do not claim that one perspective is better, because each highlights certain areas of life. The conflict sociologists are much more on constraint and changes. A multi-religious society therefore is said to be a society with much more socially related patterns of understanding, based on the socially constructed roles of religion. Teaching and learning here is technical and challenging to sociologists of education. Perhaps the role of teaching, learning and religion are functional in nature, but they promote differences, create stratification and result in religious unrest. If religious teaching takes the positive side of spiritualism it will lead to the cohesion of all sub-religious system in terms of education in multi-divers societies. This study adopts the conflict perspective, which states that religion is meant for the domination of the masses, that it is equally a tool in the hands of the elites; therefore cooperation and consensus are not ideally feasible other than social enslavement and spiritual conformity (Haralambos, Holborn and Heald, 2008).

Concepts of Teaching and Learning

Teaching is a process of transmitting knowledge, information, skills and acceptable norms and values from one generation to the other. The essence is to initiate the younger members of society into new way of life, by equipping them with knowledge and information. In the view of Mahuta (2007), teaching is a social process that brings two individuals into contact; it is the process of helping individual pupils or students to acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes by means of designed system of instruction. To Mishra (2007), teaching is at the heart of scholarship, personal integrity and the ability to communicate with the young and other audience. The important factor in teaching is the uniqueness of its contents, this makes it a source of unity, as it promotes consensus value, despite variety of ideologies in society. Many tribes, religious individuals and groups are collectively receiving one instruction at the same time and place.

The learning process does not take cognizance of "Religious differences" as knowledge, truth, reality do not have in itself sentimental features. All social beings by nature of creation have the urge for learning and this never seize. Daramola (2002) opines that learning formally evolves in the school environment; this evolution leads to attitude change, and the changes are produced by school. These involve socialization and modification of oneself in social environment. According to Bellingham (2007, pp. 173 - 174) learning is perceived as:

> the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, and beliefs through study, education, and experience. Knowledge, especially that developed by scholarly research. One learns from every reaction with the environment.

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Teaching and learning are neither based on regional factors, nor are they religiously defined or culturally labelled. But, due to the differences and interest in societies, of various regions, religion, teaching and learning has changed its melody to that of the area content, which is required. This makes teaching and learning to be more of an ideology of the society, state or nation base on the interest of dominant religious group.

Conceptualisation of Religion

Sociologists of Education study of religion involves looking at a set of meanings attached to a world far beyond human perception and observation, this is because the origin of religion is veiled in mystery. It is not the duty of sociologists to determine the type of religion people should follow, however, sociologist follow varieties of religion. Shepard and Greene (2001) states that, the objective nature of sociological investigation prompted sociologists to keep their own faith personal while investigating the social dimension of religion. Because religion is concerned with sacred things and belief is a personal affair, delicate and fragile in nature. Haralambos, Holborn and Heald (2008, p. 395) are of the view that:

> religious beliefs of one sort or another are present in every known society, but their variety seems to be endless. Any definition of religion must encompass this variety. However, it is difficult to do so without incorporating phenomena that are not normally thought of as religious.

This makes the definition of religion to reflect and have correlation with its functions to societies or to be based upon assumption about the roles and purposes of its existence. Defining religion may be based on substantive proof or argument, this is concern with the contents rather than its functions. Schaefer (2005) state that, religion is a

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unified system of beliefs, practices that is concerned with sacred things. Every society distinguishes between the sacred things and ideas, set aside with their meanings and the non sacred aspect of life. Religion is an integral part of every society, it has no static definition, scholars of various academic disciplines view the concept and activities of religion in various dimensions depending on the place where it is practiced and the nature of its practices. The general agreement of sociologists is that all societies have a kind of beliefs; this is in God, gods and beliefs in supernatural beings. This however, is having effect on the life style of societies. Otite and Ogionwo (2006) posits that, religion is a cultural institution, it can be equated with other institutions of the society and is a means, and an instrument which is used to satisfy individual and group social and spiritual needs in any particular society. According to Emile Durkheim cited in Otite and Ogionwo (2006, p. 95), religion is regarded as:

> a unified system of beliefs and practices relative
> to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart
> and forbidden beliefs and practices which unite
> into one single moral community.

Religion in sociological perspectives forms a united factor by making people a socio-religious community. Thus, it is concerned with sacred things, set of beliefs, activities of rituals, it is adhered to by the member of a community. The forms, kinds and practices are equally taught to the younger generation through schooling and other forms of religious socialization in societies.

Educational Provision for Multi-religious Nigeria

Providing education for a nation with multiple cultures or religious practices requires a policy of unity. Nigeria possesses the above stated nature of life. This with other numerous reasons makes Nigeria to form a single system of education, which

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implies the use of a uniform curriculum all over the nation, for national integration and development. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004, p. 4) states that:

> education in Nigeria is an instrument "par excellence" for effective national development. It has witnessed active participation by non-governmental agencies, communities and individuals as well as government intervention.

The initiation of National Policy on Education is a result of the out cry and result of the 1969 National Curriculum Conference in which participants were drawn from across Nigeria. After this, Nigerians reconvened in the year 1973, with many experts in attendance for the purpose of having one single body of knowledge source or information, which is the curriculum. Finally, the first National Policy on Education was first published in 1977. This was a collective effort of different individual and groups various parts of Nigeria. This gives an account of what it takes to provide education for multi-religious, multi cultural and multi-political societies. The effort of providing education to multi-religious societies is geared toward giving all religions equal chances or opportunities to have access to schools.

Teaching and learning in multi-religious societies is designed logically to take cognisance of the difference in various religions, with a complete adherence to the national curriculum. The curriculum integrated the religious differences, cultural plurality and traditional political ideology. Considering the functions of every religion to the development of the society, no one can be pushed aside for another. To prevent social and religions unrest, the National Policy on Education takes cognisance of dominant factors of the function of religions and thus, all religion are considered to be functional to

nation building and individual wellbeing. It is based on this background that Shepard and Greene (2001, p. 467) elucidate that:

> religion has several functions. It legitimates the structure of society, promotes social unity and provides sense of meaning and belonging. Marx argued that religion is used to justify and maintain the group in power. Weber believed that religion could promote social change. He connected the protestant ethic and the rise of capitalism.

Due to the importance attached to religion by various people in various societies, people acknowledge the relevance of being an integral part of the culture of a place. Religion as a social institution promotes value consensus, strengthen social cohesion and unite people in society. It improves unity, solidarity, understanding, and belonging.

Problems of Teaching and Learning in Multi-Religious Societies

- In a society where particular religion denominates, and is more popular, Christianity or Islam, the teaching attitude of the school will be inclined to the dominant religion, in that particular community or society.

- The societies that are having dominant religious group make that of lesser population to suffer inferiority in schools, for example, in Sokoto State, 98% of government primary and secondary schools do not teach "Christian Religious Knowledge" despite the fact that these schools have Christian children in attendance. Similar factor exits in Cross River state where the dominant population are Christians. Schools do not teach other Religious knowledge apart from the dominant religion in the area. This is a challenge to Sociologists of Education.

- Teachers find it difficult to integrate or assimilate their religious ideology to that of where they find themselves, which is otherwise different from their own. The

implication is that teachers take sides, which is not fair and just to their social responsibilities of humanitarian services (teaching and learning).

- Students in schools that are openly active to the promotion of a particular religion, tend to promote understanding of religious differences and create religious tension among other students. This situation is not favouring the stability of the school and the society, as it is contrary to the ideology of National Policy on Education.

- Teachers cannot promote secularism in a multi-religious society; they find it difficult to promote scientific facts and theories. This is because secularism is the opposite side of religion and science is not equally religion. Therefore, teaching and learning in multi-religious society pose challenges to educational experts and sociologists of education.

Conclusion

Education in multi-religious society poses challenges to teachers and sociologists of education. This can best be promoted by applying a federal system of education. Presently the educational style practiced by the Nigerian government, in promoting unity within multiplicity of cultures, beliefs and political ideologies, is the unitary system of education, initiated by Federal system and policies on education. Strengthening this will unite the educational goals, aspirations and philosophy of a nation towards national development.

Recommendations

All public schools should provide for every child their own religions teacher; this will make them to imbibe the culture of respect and acknowledge other people's religions, promote equality of right, opportunity of learning and respect for religious

differences. Teachers who are to embark on this exercise should be able to live in any part of the country and exercise their religious rights and obligations without fear of molestation.

Professionally trained teachers should desist from condemning or going against any form of religious teachings and practices. All teaching and learning exercise should be free from bigotry, and should be on a neutral and equal footing in the school environment and Nigerian schools should not serve as grounds to promote religious extremism.

Sociologists of Education should promote the idea of secularism and democratic fair society, with the view of uniting the nation. They should ensure that education in Nigeria is free from bigotry and students should develop fair reasoning attitude toward national development.

Sociologists of education should be rational in terms of religious ideologies. A professionally trained Sociologists of Education should aim at promoting the interest of the system as a whole but not individual interest. This will in no small measure help individuals to embrace the ideology of humanity as well as propagating principles and ideas for better societies.

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