RELEVANCE OF CULTURAL PLURALISM AND SOCIAL-STUDIES CURRICULUM TO EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AS PERCEIVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF ILORIN SANDWICH STUDENTS

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Abstract

This paper investigated the perception of final year Social Studies education sandwich students in the University of Ilorin on the relevance of cultural pluralism and Social Studies curriculum to educational development in Nigeria. A descriptive method of the survey type has been adopted to a total of 82 who were purposively and randomly sampled. Two null hypotheses were formulated for the study and t-test was used to test the hypotheses. The findings are that, the perceptions of Social Studies education sandwich students in the University of Ilorin on the relevance of cultural pluralism and Social Studies curriculum to the Nigerian educational development which was popularly acceptable(mean=69.95). Also gender and religion did not seem to significantly influence their perceptions. The implication of this is that themes pertaining to culture in the Nigerian Social Studies curriculum should be taught from the pluralistic point of view.

Introduction

Culture is a construct that is in wide use in the social sciences and the humanities. Because of the diversity of its uses, the concept of culture has often been caught in a considerable amount of confusion (Ekeh, 1989). In the first case, it could be helpful to separate the meaning of culture in the social sciences. The discipline of anthropology is dominated by attempts to understand the culture of people. In its typical anthropological meaning, culture is not evaluative in terms of standard of morality. Let us examine some of these usages; Edward Tylor (1871) views culture as that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, arts, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. Linton (1940) defines culture as the sum total of knowledge, attitudes and habitual behaviour patterns shaped and transmitted by the members of a particular society. Herskovits (1955) simply defines culture as the man-made part of the environment.

Kroeber (1948) defines it as the mass of learned and transmitted motor reactions, habits, techniques, ideas and values and the behaviour they induce. Clyde Kluchohn (1945:97) defines culture as the historically created design for living, explicit and implicit, rational, irrational and non rational, which may exist at any given time as a potential guide for the behaviour of men. Other anthropologists have contributed to the definitions of the concept of culture. Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) examined well over a hundred definitions by anthropologists and found none wholly acceptable. A common attribute of most of these definitions however, is that a culture is learned and that the learning is related to the social group or the society. However, the use of culture in the humanities is evaluative. It refers to the refinement of history and civilization in society or even clusters of societies. Thus, there is a one-sided selection of what is regarded as "cultured" in the humanities; it is to be civilized, to be refined. Literacy is the vehicle of culture in the humanities as an illiterate individual could be referred to as "uncultured".

Meanwhile, culture is a construct that is widely used in both the social sciences and the humanities; in the same way, Social Studies is the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Both are deeply connected with social sciences and the humanities. It is on this reasoning that culture and Social Studies

are bedmates.

Distinction between 'Singularism' and Cultural 'Pluralism'

Western thought has long been dominated by the view that while error is plural, truth is singular. We can be wrong in many different ways but can be right in only one way. According to this view, there is only one correct way of understanding the world, only one true system of morality, only one true way of leading the good life, only one true religion, only one correct way of organizing society. We are supposed to arrive at truth, be it cognitive, moral or religious by means of reason, which is understood as a transcendental and quasi-divine faculty, rising above the psychological, social, cultural and other constraints. This view is called monism or singularism (Bhikhu Parekh, 1991).

Cultural pluralism on the other hand challenges this view of truth and goodness. It sees reason as a human rather than a quasi-divine or transcendental with all it implies. Since it holds the view that human beings are culturally embedded, it argues that reason is shaped and structured by culture. This idea of cultural pluralism originated from the United States and was developed by pragmatist philosophers such as William James (1842-1910) and John Dewey (1859-1952). It is a term used when smaller groups within a larger society maintain their unique cultural identities, and their values and practices are accepted by the wider culture. However, singularism or monism maintains that truth and goodness are absolute. This view has inspired most rigorous intellectual inquiries, rules of rational debate and a determination to expose and fight errors. But it has also led to arrogance, intolerance, failure to appreciate differences, tendency to equate diversity with deviation, and much violence.

Although cultural pluralism is a radical idea with profound implications, it is quite different from and should not be confused with relativism. For the relativist, truth is relative to and its validity is limited to a particular community. Like the monist, the relativist too assumes that truth is singular; the only difference between the two being that while the former asserts the universal validity of a particular view or vision of the world, the relativist limits it to a particular social unit. Cultural pluralism rejects both. It immunizes one against the tendency to think that our view of the world, religion or system of

morality alone is correct and can rightly be used to judge all others. It thus breeds humility, respect for others, openness to dialogue and the spirit of self-criticism. It also encourages us to see others not as strangers or a hostile threat but rather as conversational partners who bring us the gift of self consciousness and access to their treasures and whose existence is a necessary precondition of our growth.

At the social and political level, cultural pluralism implies that public discourse cannot be conducted in a single conceptual or moral language and must allow for a diversity of idioms and languages. This puts into question the dominant view that a society cannot be stable unless all its members share a substantive vision of the good life. It also questions our conventional views of such central concepts as personal autonomy, equality, liberty and justice, all of which can be defined and related in different ways, such as quota system and differential funding to bridge the educational gaps between regions. According to National Council for Social Studies - NCSS (1994), Social Studies is integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. The primary purpose of Social Studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an independent world.

From this definition, Social Studies is an issue focused and inquiry based interdisciplinary subject which provides opportunities for students to acquire the knowledge and skills and develop attitudes necessary for them to become responsible citizens essential in a multi-cultural and contemporary society like Nigeria (Ifegbesan, 2008). A philosophical argument is that education should be more functional and more relevant to the needs of both the child and the society. This could be realized by the teaching of social education through a broad-based and integrated programme that is child-centred and community-oriented, thereby allowing the learner the opportunity to learn through a functional approach to practise the theories, concepts, skills and knowledge acquired in the process of education (Ezegbe, 1993).

Consequent upon this, the concepts and methodology of Social Studies are determined by certain modern and basic educational philosophies of functionalism, pragmatism, progressivism and

experimentalism. Methods are selected following those guiding principles that would satisfy the educational criteria of validity, relevance, variety, suitability, commutation and multiple learning (Tyler, 1949:68). These are observed in the Nigerian Social Studies curriculum, which is integrated in nature. Reviewing works on views of Social Studies pre-service teachers, Solomon (2001) studied the views of 170 NCE pre-service teachers on the desirability of "origin of man" as a theme in their Social Studies curriculum and reported that 84.7 percent of the sample (i.e. 161 out of 170) had a positive view about the theme. He also did not find a significant difference in their views on the basis of religion as both Christian and Muslim subjects upheld a popular positive opinion about the sub-theme of creation (which is a sub-set of origin of man); although, the Christians had a slight increase of 0.4 percent which was not statistically significant.

In a study on the influence of gender on achievement, Ogbonna (1998), reported that male subjects scored higher than their female counterparts in the physical sciences and concluded that the supremacy of the males in the area of critical thinking and cognition is a biological process which tends to appear very early in the life cycle and remains constant in individual male species. Similarly, Kayode (2002) in his study on gender and academic achievement reported that gender differences favoured girls in reading performance, particularly at adolescent stage. He concluded by attributing the higher performance of the females to the presence of the estrogen hormone being more present in the female gender.

However, Ireogbu (1998) explained that there is no significant effect of gender in physics achievement and problem solving. Also, Ayedun (2000) showed that there is no significant difference in the mathematics achievement tests performance and reported that his findings did not seem to depend on gender. This is in agreement with Yusuf (2004) that the performance of students was not dependent on gender.

Statement of the Problem
It has been frequently observed that the absence of a common loyalty to one religion or culture touches the social problem of Nigeria at the very core (Fan, Eta and Fan, 2004). This is a conventional view. On the

other hand, numerous empirical works on cultural pluralism had been conducted in the United States by Rawls and Parekh (2002) amongst others, the outcome of which is reported to have forced the society to rethink her conventional assumptions and redesign her social - political institutions for good like in the United States. Nigeria is a multi-cultural society and Social Studies is being offered on a national scale at the Basic Education level. If the study on the perception of cultural pluralism were to be conducted in Nigeria; would it win a unanimous acceptability like in the United States or would it just be a chance effect? It is therefore the quest to replicate the study on the relevance of cultural pluralism and the Social Studies curriculum on educational development with a view to broadening the society's traditional, moral, social and political philosophy as well as to expand the frontiers of knowledge in Social Studies education that has formed the background to this study.

Purpose

The general purpose of this research is to investigate the perceptions of the Social Studies sandwich students about the relevance of cultural pluralism and the Social Studies curriculum to the Nigerian educational development. However, the specific purpose is to find out the influence of variables such as gender and religion on their perceptions.

Hypotheses

The two null hypotheses formulated for the study are as follows:

$H0_1$: There is no significant difference between male and female University of Ilorin sandwich Social Studies education student in their perception of the relevance of cultural pluralism and Social Studies curriculum to educational development

$H0_2$: There is no significant difference between Christian and Muslim sandwich Social Studies education students in their perception of the relevance of cultural pluralism and Social Studies curriculum to educational development.

Method

Descriptive research of the survey type was adopted. A total of 82 final year Social Studies education sandwich students from the Universal of Ilorin were purposively sampled. By gender, 36 were male and 46 were female while by religion 43 were Christians and 39 were Muslims. The instrumentation was a 20-item questionnaire containing positive opinion statements on cultural pluralism, Social Studies curriculum, Social Studies and culture. An equal number of items were generated on each of these sub-topics. It was sub-divided into two parts: part A contained the personal bio-data of the respondents while part B contained the positive opinion statements enumerated above requiring their perceptions to be rated on a four-point rating scale of strongly agree; agree; disagreed and; strongly disagree, on their relevance to educational development. It was validated by three subject experts in the Department of Arts and Social Sciences Education, University of Ilorin to assess both the face and content validity of the instrument. Since the subjects were literate, they were required to read and tick their responses in a situation captive mood. This saved time and information were collected from the subjects immediately. Their views were scored as follows: strongly agree – 4; agree – 3; disagree – 2 and; strongly disagree – 1. Based on this scoring pattern, the views of the subjects were classified into four groups to reflect their categories of view on the topic as follows: 1 – 20 = very low view; 21 – 40 = low view; 41 – 60 = high view and; 61 – 80 = very high view on their perception about the relevance of cultural pluralism and the Social Studies curriculum to educational development. The percentage analysis and means score were used to describe the sample while the t-test kind of inferential statistics were used to test the two null hypothesis formulated for the study.

Results

Ho1: There is no significant difference between male and female University of Ilorin sandwich Social Studies education students' perception of the relevance of cultural pluralism and Social Studies curriculum to educational development.

Table 1 presents the t-test analysis of the perception of male and female University of Ilorin sandwich Social Studies education student

on the relevance of cultural pluralism and Social Studies curriculum to educational development

Table 1: T-test analysis of the samples' views on the basis of gender

The summary of t-test analysis on table five above shows that there is no significant difference in the views of the study sample on cultural pluralism and the Social Studies curriculum on the basis of their

Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	DF	t-calculated	t-critical	Remark
Male	36	1.251	.384	35			
Female	46	1.286	.395	45	1.67	1.54	P> 0.05

of the relevance of cultural pluralism and Social Studies curriculum to educational development.

Table 2 presents the test analysis of difference between Christian and Muslim sandwich Social Studies education students in their perception of the relevance of cultural pluralism and Social Studies curriculum to educational development

Table 2: t-test analysis of the samples' views on the basis of religion

The summary of the t-test on the table 2 above shows that there is no significant difference in the views of the study sample based on

their religions.

Religion	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	DF	t - calculated	t- critical	Remark
Christian	43	1.42	.502	42			
Muslim	39	1.40	.496	38	1.59	1.37	P> 0.05

relevance of cultural pluralism and the Social Studies curriculum to the educational development. The implication of this is that both male and female respondents recognise the relevance of cultural pluralism highly to educational development. This suggests that equal consideration should be given to both the males and females to learn about cultural pluralism. In addition, this study has found out that both Christian and Muslim had a high perception about the relevance of the cultural pluralism to education development. The implication of this finding is that it would not be difficult to teach the subject matter of cultural pluralism on Nigerians, irrespective of religious affiliation.

Conclusion and Recommendations
Based on the findings of this study, it is worthwhile to conclude that gender and religious affiliation are no hindrances to education for cultural pluralism in the Nigerian school especially with Social Studies as the carrier-subject.

Premised on this, it is hereby recommended that the theme of culture as featured in the Social Studies curriculum should be taught using a pluralistic approach rather than singularity of approach. Since both male and female had a very high perception about its relevance to educational development, it is opined that equal distribution of educational opportunities and fair hearing should be given to both male and female citizens. Moreover, Social Studies teachers should supplement or compliment the efforts of religious teachers and leaders in nurturing the conscience of their students to remove the negative impacts of culture while teaching on any theme relating to culture. Moreover, teacher educators and teacher education institutions are encouraged to research more into as many tribes and cultures as possible like: Yoruba, Hausa. Igbo, Igala, Ebira, Fulani, Kanuri, Calabari, Isoko, Urhobo etc to study their mores, folk-laws and folk – ways on themes such as marriage, naming, burial rites, and dressing and to teach these themes and sub-themes from the pluralistic point

of view.

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