YOUTHS EDUCATION AND ETHNIC RELATIONS IN CONFLICT TRANSITING COMMUNITIES OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

Ethnic relations among former adversaries in conflict transiting communities in Nigeria have not been assessed since they have been settled. This study examined the influence of education at both formal school and non-formal institutions of voluntary organizations in transforming the traumatic experiences and improving the ethnic relationship among youths of school ages. Using inter-ethnic marriage, transformation of prejudice behaviour and reduction in trauma as indices, the survey research focused on the ljaw- Ilaje communities of Ondo State, Nigeria. Data was collected from respondents through focus group discussion and questionnaire. t-test inferential analyses revealed a significant difference between the effects of learning received from formal school and non-formal voluntary organizations (t = 1.617 >0.05). The Focus group discussion revealed that formal school was weaker in changing youths fear about inter- marriage, while non-formal institutions were more influential in changing their opinion. Other factors that influence youths decision about inter-marrying were cultural outlaws, family rules, personal fears, religion and experience. It was recommended that peace education be instituted in school curriculum and that non-formal institutions be

encouraged so that they can complement peace education efforts in formal schools.

Introduction

The society and their immediate families shape behavioural patterns of youths (Henslin, 2005). Other factors that influence and determine behaviours and reactions to particular objects, subjects and issues are education and negative or positive feedbacks during contact with opposing ethnic groups. Sometimes, behaviours and reactions to particular situations, are not formed through negative or positive contacts alone, they are also formed through cultural imbuement and incitements from social mentors, parents, traditional leaders, religious leaders and teachers, who are the chief causes and custodians of stereotyping and prejudice (Schaefer 2010; Brookfield 1995; Mezirow 1994). Nigerian youths are exposed to all of these factors that guide and influence behaviour. Culture, as a cause for stereotypes on one hand is responsible for paradynamic assumptions that youth would display their frame of reference that deep-seats in underlying values and belief systems that shape and dictate their everyday attitude and behaviours. These factors lead to a heavy feeling of ethnocentricity, a situation where an individual believes in the intrinsic superiority of his/her own culture above other cultures which is viciously accompanied with dislike and contempt for other groups (Delahaye, 2000).

In addition to these influences are political antics by political elites, who deceive their communities with the claim that a political party belongs to a particular ethnic group. Example of this is how Yoruba political elites associate political parties like Action Group (AG), the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP),

the United Party of Nigeria (UPN), Social Democratic Party (SDP), Alliance for Democracy (AD), and most recent Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) as representing the interests of the Yoruba people and following this legacy of their hero Chief Obafemi Awolowo. Similarly, other ethnic groups follow this tradition in the eastern part of Nigeria.

The Igbos followed the leadership of Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe's the National Council for Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), and National Party of Nigeria (NPN) and the latest formed by Chief Emeka Ojukwu, All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA). In the North we have had the Northern People Congress followership of Sir Ahmadu Bello, and other break aways to mobilize exclusive ethnic group interest such as the Aminu Kano's Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPUN and later the People's Redemption Party (PRP) for Kano people, The J.S Tarka's United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) and recently the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) mobilized by General Mohamadu Buhari were all ethnic based. These self-political agenda have promoted acts of hooliganism, militia in extreme cases or even genocide by garnering the support of unsuspecting youths through incitement to pitch camps against other ethnic groups (Otite, 2001, Kuna 2003; Awa, 1981). Youths are constantly being mobilized, and lured into becoming militia members and political thugs until today (Suifon, 2006). It is not surprising that ethno political struggles and need for relevance and areas of control by politicians has transformed into communal and ethnic conflicts. The Tiv-Jukun conflict, Ife-Modakeke's crisis, Itsekiri -Ijaw Urhobo wars, and Ilaje- Ijaw violence are examples that come to mind (IPRC, 2001).

Violence between two divergent cultures or groups produce trauma, which is a fearful state of mind that promotes unforgiveness and hatred. Revenge and incitement of close associates, youths, children and friends are common products of such state of affair.

Youths with such experiences exist in Nigeria where protracted ethnic/communal violent conflicts have been resolved through third party conflict mediation. Majaro-Majesty (2006) reports that even though conflict transformation strategies have succeeded on the short -run in transforming conflict between warring communities into a peacebuilding process, there still exists mutual distrust and suspicions. In other words, negative peace exists in those places studied, which includes Jukun-Tiv, Ife-Modakeke, Itsekiri-Urhobo, Ilaje-Ijaw violent conflicts. This may be generalized for conflict transiting communities in Nigeria.

Majaro-Majesty maintains that to sustain these achievements, stakeholder's forum had been instituted. While most adults have been invited to constitute stakeholder's forum in most of these communities, youth's representation in these forum, have been minimal. It may be suspected that youth's involvement in long-term peacebuilding process is also minimized, and certain structures, which should transform youth's behaviours, are lacking or faulty (Oshita 2006). First, apart from youth's exclusion from stakeholders forum, other educational provisions such as youth voluntary organizations, like Boys Scouts, Man 'O' War and others, whose aim is to build a virile youth for the society may also have been under emphasized as a veritable medium for youth behaviour transformation.

Research done in these communities, have not shown the valuable impacts of youth organizations in peacebuilding process.

Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria

The communal ethnic conflicts between Ife-Modakeke, Ijaw/Ilaje, Ijaw/Itsekiri/Urhobo, Tiv/Jukun, are typical examples of heavily armed and organised ethnic warfare ever noticed in Nigeria. Apart from their extensive use of modern warfare equipments, there was also a vast use of war tactics, which included the strategic killings of sons and daughter in-laws and their children who were products of such inter-marriages. In the African context, traditional marriage between two ethnic communities was a sacred message of cooperation and signal of willingness to co-habit. It was also a way of guaranteeing peace and harmony. These killings were intended at severing any blood relationship or union between the two communities where there had been great permeation of cultures and blood ties through inter-marriages before conflict broke-out.

These acts of ethnic cleansing are similar to those of Hutu/Tutsi ethnic conflicts in Rwanda. This desperate effort of annulments of inter-ethnic marriages between former adversaries, were aimed at ensuring that no loophole was left for opposing ethnic group to dominate and claim lands through inter-ethnic blood relations.

Annulments of marriages in Nigeria's ethnic conflict, is common in conflicts between coexisting ethnic groups who contest ownership of the land. These conflicts were long outstanding conflicts between two co-existing entities in the same geographically defined area.

Although, there were political undertones in most of the ethnic conflicts, the aim was self-determination for reclaiming of land and against domination (Imobighe 2003, Otite, 2000, Albert, 2001) and reclaim dominance (Majaro-Majesty, 2006). This has been described as a struggle between early and late settlers (Majaro-Majesty, 2008).

What led to these divides between these formerly peaceful co-existence has been blamed on over-centralization of political control, poor representation of all ethnic groups, and over-lucrative nature of partisan politics, which degenerated to a winner takes it all, for himself and ethnic group (Institute of Peace and Conflict Resolution 2003). This was demonstrated by military autocracy since 1966, only handing over in 1979 to a "democratic government that lasted for just two out of four years before they were ousted again by the military in 1983 that stayed until 1999, before handing-over to democratically elected government.

In that wise, political powers gained by military junta, was converted as a victory for themselves, ethnic groups, and their apologists, who also influenced policies and infrastructure developments to favour themselves and their ethnic groups. Two major factors determined which ethnic group gets political appointments, or political control; education and population (Osaghea, 1994). These two factors work together, even though population proved stronger in elections, which is all about game of the number. The third factor was economic wealth of an ethnic group, which determines whether a candidate is sponsored for political position, or could mobilize for violence. All these factors come together to play a role in the ethnic domination and oppressions of opposing ethnic groups. The oppressed ethnic groups on realizing there oppressed status mobilizes for war, in a bid for

self determination. Peacebuilding between such warring groups could begin with peace education.

Youth and Peace Education in Nigeria

The content of peacebuilding education for communities has been according to how Weiss (2007) describes it:

"...a holistic approach to preparing young people for active participation in democracy by teaching for and about human rights, gender equality, sustainable development, disarmament, international, social and economic justice, human security and traditional peace practices"

Two important points deducible from this definition is that peace education focuses on youths and on democratizing people. This perfectly describes the thinking of Awa (1983) that formal schools relate to the social context of Nigeria. Coincidentally, the most compulsory place of meeting with youths in the world has been the formal school and non-formal educational systems. These fora used for impacting knowledge and behaviour transformation, are also required for community's positive peace. Unfortunately, research that assesses the content and adequacy of Nigeria's formal school curriculum for peace education are minimal. Lessons intended to convey messages of peaceful behaviours have also been very minimal, shallow and inadequate in scope (Majaro-Majesty, 2005, Oshita 2006). Review of reports under curriculum in the Education Sector Status Report on Nigeria (Federal Ministry of Education. 2003), confirms this. The report under curriculum clearly states the objectives of junior secondary school education as focusing on academic and pre-vocational skills in early life; while the National Policy on examinations excludes social studies and civic education, as

part of generally/compulsorily/required subject. This development is not good enough for a nation seeking peace and national integration of its entire ethnic group (Federal Ministry of Education, May 2003).

Non-formal education through youth organizations are expected to supplement and complement formal school system through organized activities that commit youths to participate in community and social development programmes that foster unity togetherness and friendship among members of and between communities experiencing conflict transition. These are demonstrated in their teaching, in meetings and association's tasks sharing and or role-play. But does this feature continue outside their meeting? In my opinion, the role of formal school and non-formal education in behaviour transformation and better ethnic relations are assessable by examining inter-ethnic marriage, as enhanced by culture or otherwise. The pressure of cultural outlawing of inter marriages and antecedents of violent dissolution of such marriages as common to most protracted and organized conflicts in Nigeria is a negative indicator in ethnic relations. Other indices are the open expressions of attachments between individuals from opposite ethnic community, either as friends or as members of the same club tasks without restraints and fear. If these indices are well examined, the extent of improvement in the ethnic relations between former adversaries would be clear. Positive indicators for good ethnic relations are forgiveness, healing trauma and distrust as well as signs of abating feelings of suspicion and the use of stereotype between former conflicting communities. The question to be asked here therefore is; how have formal and non-formal education influenced positive and negative behaviours and patterns of

interactions and relationship like inter-marriage among formerly conflicting communities?

This study, therefore, sought to assesses the influences of formal and non-formal educational fora on youth's violent behaviour in conflict transiting communities of Ilaje and ljaw-Arogbo in South- West Nigeria. This is considered as the first step towards proffering endurable education to engender peacebuilding efforts in Nigeria.

Assessing the improvement of ethnic relations in these communities is necessary and justified because post-conflict transition has been over 10 years. Indications from studies by Aronso and Osherow (1980), Sharan (1985) and Powell (1994), interventions involving behavioural modification carried out within the spread of three decades indicate possible reduction in racial prejudice. This assertion leads to the assumptions raised below that education and learning environment provided by formal and non-formal voluntary organizations could provide some kind of intervention on youths and adolescents attitude towards peaceful co-existence among contemporaries and non-contemporaries former adversary ethnic groups

Research Hypothesis and Questions

The hypothesis states as follows: -

❖ There is no significant difference, as a result of education received formally and non-formally on the desire of the youths of both conflict transiting communities to relate freely.

The research questions for the study were raised to further investigate some indicators of positive communal conflict transformation of ethnic violent into peacebuilding process.

- ❖ Are Ilaje and Arogbo-ljaw youths, still antagonists of their contemporaries from each other's communities?
- ❖ Are Ilaje and Arogbo-ljaw youths willing to marry from each other's ethnic groups?
- ❖ What factors would make the youths of opposite communities to or not to inter-marry between Ilaje and Arogbo Ijaw?

Method

The research design adopted for the study was the survey research type. The study's objective was to assess the influence of education on non-cooperative behaviours and unwillingness to inter-marry between former adversary communities. The field survey design was valuable because with direct questions about underlying attributes, beliefs and intentions, inferences can accurately be deduced from data collected from respondents about factors underlying behaviours, as well as serve the purpose for evaluating a situation (Borden and Abot, 2001). The triangulation research method was adopted, so that more than one method (qualitative and quantitative) would provide crosscheck or offer mutual validation of data/finding (Singh, 1994).

The purposive sampling technique was adopted to select two schools, one in the Arogbo-Ijaw territories and another in the Ilaje Community. Two voluntary youths' organisations - Man O war and Boys scout and a Girl's Guide were selected according to their accessibility. A convenient sample of 300 respondents

was adopted for the study, with 100 respondents from each secondary school and 100 from voluntary organisations. The structured questionnaire named ethnic relations scale (ERS), which was of the Likert scale was adopted to elicit quantitative data, while focus group discussion and observations were adopted to elicit qualitative data. Colleagues and other econometric experts did the content, face and construct validity of the instruments. This helped in the modification of the questionnaires and some structured oral interview questions. With this, the confidence on the theoretical, readability

was meaningfulness of the questions fielded was restored and was positive. The questionnaire was subjected to a reliability test through a pilot study carried out with students of two secondary schools and two voluntary organizations, one Boys ,Scout, and Man O' War organisations located at a well pronounced plural community Mokola and UI in Ibadan. Ibadan though is not among communities transiting from ethnic conflicts.

The triangular research method, adopted afforded the researcher the opportunity of reducing irregularities that hail from untruthful entry of opinion elicited by the questionnaire. The same also applied to interview and focus group discussions. This method came handy when contrast occurred between responses elicited by questionnaires (Likert Scale) and those of oral interview. Paricipants of the pilot study who entered random answers on the questionnaires were detected when their responses to oral interview questions, did not tally. The pilot study proved that there was a significant relationship between education and social/voluntary organizations training on willingness to marry but was discarded soon after the reliability list of the focus group interview proved non-significant. This occurrence

informed participants being made to fill questionnaires in the presence of questionnaire administrator, even though with personal persuasion.

The questionnaire was administered to students in their schools, with the cooperation of teachers. This facilitated the return of all the questionnaires given out. During the administration of questionnaires on the voluntary organisations, only 81 questionnaires were returned. In order to complete the required sample of 300, 19 more students were made to fill the questionnaire using the random sampling technique. At the end therefore we had 219 respondents from the schools, and 81 from voluntary organisations, while the study still retained its sample size of 300.

For the Focus Group Discussion (FGD), which gave the qualitative data, four sessions of discussion interviews were held, one each in each secondary school while one each for Boy scouts and Man O War movement. Each FGD group consisted of 12 discussants. The data collected was analysed using t-test statistics to determine the differences between education and social training in formal schools and non-formal voluntary youth association groups. Frequency and percentage were also used to deduce information, while responses from interviews were used to complement quantitative results.

Findings

The findings are presented below. The tables presented show the result of the analysis of data followed by the interpretation of the same data. The discussions on findings were made afterwards to reduce all findings to meaning, and implication for peacebuilding process which is instituted in the area of study.

Hypothesis I

There is no significant difference between education received formally and non-formally on youths desire to relate freely with youths from the opposite communities.

Table I: t-test analysis of education received and desire to relate freely

Variable	Types of learning	N	Mean	t	df
Learning	Formal Non-formal	81	22.05	1.617	198
medium	Learning	219	23.55	(NS)	

P>0.05 not significant

From the table above, the result of the t-test analysis t= 1.617> 0.05 shows that there was no significant difference between the effects of learning received from formal school and non-formal voluntary organisations on desire to relate freely. The hypothesis five was therefore rejected.

Research Question

Are youths in formal and non-formal education still antagonists of their contemporaries from former adversary communities?

Distribution of discussants responses revealed that 65% of youths, from formal schools indicated that there have been lessened fears of attack from both communities, while 35% still thinks of the effects of war as a reason to be prepared for any subsequent actions.

Out of the 65% who indicated lessened fear, 47% were female out of 35% participants from formal school who believed that there is still need to fear, 27% were female. The result from youths from the voluntary organisations (non-formal education) presents a 72% for those who think of a lessened fear; and further antagony. The gender distribution of participants constituting this figure . that 35% are male and 37% were female. This constituted 92% of the total female participants from the non-formal discussion group. The distribution of responds from the discussion also showed at out of the 18% who believes that there were still reasons to fear and that there still existed antagony, 21% were of the female gender while the remaining 79% were male. It is inferable that there still existed antagony between youths. Even though signs of reduction can be observed, it appears little and slow considering the number of years.

Research Question 2

Are youths willing to marry from former adversary ethnic communities?

Distribution of discussants' responses reveals that 56% from non-formal schools agreed that they could marry from communities of former adversary. Out of this 56%, 21% were female, while the remaining 35% were male. The percentage of those who disagree to inter-marry was 44%, out of which 52% were female, and the remaining 48% were male. The distribution of responses fromdiscussants in the non-formal education groups (voluntary organisation) shows that 55% indicated willingness to inter-marry. Out of this percentage, only 25% are male, while 75% are female.

Out of the 45% who disagree to inter-marry, only 33% of these were female while 13% were male. There are still indications of fear towards inter-marriage between

youths of former adversaries. It shows that females are more constrained than the male and that students from non-formal organisations showed more liberal attitude towards inter-marriage.

Research Questions 3

What factors would inform Ilaje and Arogbo-Ijaw youth's decision to or not to intermarry?

Distribution of responses from discussants from the formal school system presented, indicated religions, blood relationship, ethnic culture, school exposures to knowledge and natural likeness for individual involved, as factors that would influence youths opinion over inter- ethnic marriage. For those who agreed to inter-marry, the factors, in order of rating are religion (63%), blood relations (41%), education received from school, 37% and natural fondness of the individual involved, 35%. A combination of all these factors influenced the thinking of approximately half - 50% of discussants. A further query into why few chose education as a factor, showed that (even though teachings in school did not include peace education) formal school education afforded them with cognitive skills to decide what is right, just and acceptable. One of them puts it "if one is educated he should not behave like illiterates".

This interprets that there should be a difference in thinking and understanding between him (educated) and others (non-educated); people should not decide his life for him. Another female discussant in her words says, "I should be able to think for myself". For those who declined to inter-marry, outlawing of inter-marriages, by ethnic group, family's rule, and personal fears are responsible for their opinion. Ratings continued as such showing that personal fears (55%) and

family rules (55%) were more responsible for their decision; ethnic rule (45%) also held a strong influence.

Discussants at the non-formal educational level (voluntary organisations) presented four influencing factors to their decision in the ranking order of education and training received 75% fondness of the individual 73%, blood-ties 72% and religion 70% in the rank order Out of the 25% who declined to inter-marry, personal experience, 75%, family's rule 71% and ethnic outlaw, were 55% major influences of their decision.

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendation

This study confirmed that learning environments, whether school or non-formal medium of education provides an atmosphere under which socialization and reformation happens. Learning received through these means provides the transformation required for trauma and prejudice reduction to occur in youths. Some variations in strength and effectiveness also exist between non-formal and formal education on influencing youths over inter-ethnic marriage, between Ilaje and Arogbo-ljaw communities. While formal schools seem to be weaker in reforming youths' minds towards inter-ethnic marriage, non-formal education is stronger at reforming youth's decisions over inter-marriage and towards a humanitarian mind. There was also a difference in the responses of male and female participants of the focus group discussion over Inter-ethnic marriage. The female group declined more to inter-marry than their male counter-part. Other factors that also influence youth's decision towards inter-ethnic marriage are family rules, ethnic outlaws and personal fears and experiences. All these factors combined influences more of the female gender more than their male gender.

This shows that all of these factors would combine to affect their decision but the three factors, personal fear and personal experience; and family outlaw/rule would combine more often than ethnic rules or outlaw of inter-marriage in the decision making of youths of Ilajes and Arogbo-Ijaw communities of Ondo State.

It was observed that humanitarian ideology of the voluntary organisations, influenced members highly, and not that there was adequate peace education contents in the training given. The non-formal education received through voluntary organisations, different from formal school, had a positive influence on youth's decision to inter-marry, and at the same time, it had positive influence above families and ethnic values. However, it had less influence on female, than on male. This result could be inferred to be as a result of less female participation in voluntary organisations in the area, and families influence on girl child. Culturally, male are set loose to marry as they choose, believing that the male child is contributing to the family while the girl child is being taken away to the disadvantage of the family It could also be inferred, that girls of both communities are afraid of inter-marring based on their eye witness of other women who are traumatized over the loss of their husbands and children to the inter-ethnic war.

This study has shown that family and ethnic or communal influences are stronger than the influence of formal school on youth's life decision. Findings from FGD, shows that peace education is not taught in schools and voluntary organisation, but youths might have been influenced by hidden curriculum used by teachers. Hidden curriculum describes the values that although are not explicitly taught, but are part or a schools message, observed in stories and examples that teacher

give in class; which may bring about lessons in patriotism, democracy, Justice, and honesty (Henslin, 2005).

Inference could still be made from the evidence of this study that hidden curriculum was not as strong as family values in formal schools. However, where schools have had influence on the youth's behaviour and decisions, hidden curriculum may have come to play The voluntary organization's humanitarian ideology, has displayed in this study great influence on these youths, owing to hidden curriculum anticipated at their meetings, humanitarian belief are reinforced on youths. This study reinforces the role of education on youth's decision formation, as it can be inferred that formal schools and non-formal education have produced a transformation in youth's behaviour that these communities require for peacebuilding. Voluntary organisations also produced a great peer group influence through strong bound of comradeship that can help them resist family, and cultural influences. In view of this finding formal school learning alone cannot transform youth's violent behaviour, and mobilize their participation in peacebuilding in the conflict transiting community. Therefore, non-formal education for youths' should be widely emphasized alongside formal school education, through youth's voluntary organizations. Voluntary organization's humanitarian believe and principles should be integrated with formal school education to enhance conflict transformation and peacebuilding efforts in communities transiting from war and adversary. Schools curriculum that would attack stereotypes, and prejudices and encourage inter-ethnic contacts should be developed, to complement other efforts at peacebuilding. In that wise peace education should be consciously designed and encouraged in Nigeria's school and youth development programmes and projects. If this is done, Nigeria's

multi-ethnic problems could be solved when youths are carried along through school education and involvement in humanitarian activities that bring them together to work as a team. In the same vein it becomes easier for other creative social strategies to be used to incorporate youths into participating in development programmes in their communities, which leads ultimately to making them better citizens.

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