

Role of Adult and Non-Formal Education in Promoting Religious Tolerance and National Integration in Nigeria for A Peaceful Co-existence

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Abstract

Nigeria is a country with many ethnic groups with religious, cultural, political and idiosyncratic differences. Hence this has resulted into identity crisis, intolerance and violence between two or more groups. In recent times in Nigeria, there has been a clash of interests, religious differences, ethnic rivalry, discrimination, oppression, nepotism to mention but few which has resulted into violence leading to several cases of death, loss of properties and dislocation among others. Must or should we continue living in fear and insecurity? The paper examines concept of religion, religious intolerance, religious tolerance, national integration, peaceful co-existence and adult and non-formal education. The paper further discusses the role of adult and non-formal education in promoting religious tolerance and national integration in Nigeria. The paper recommends that adult and non-formal education should be used for public enlightenment and re-orientation of citizens on religious tolerance among others.

Keywords: Adult & Non Formal Education, Religious Tolerance, National Integration, Promoting and Peaceful Co-existence

Introduction

Religion is a set of spiritual beliefs about two key aspects of life: concern with the ultimate meaning of human existence, and identification with a supernatural power beyond the limits of the human natural worlds (UNESCO, 2010). There are basically three major religions in Nigeria. Likewise, the country is made up of several ethnic groups with over 500 languages and thus Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious state. Each ethnic and religious group has its own culture, beliefs and dogmas which vary from one group to another. As such, each religious sect wants to uphold their own religious beliefs or ethnic culture at the expense of others and this has been leading to incessant conflicts and disunity amidst us and has culminated into a threat to national unity which has been a top priority of governments in Nigeria. Nigeria has witnessed several conflicts either on religious grounds or ethnic grounds which has made people to lose their lives and properties and this has as well caused the country a lot of socio-economic and psychological trauma. In recent times in Nigeria, there have been crises of all sorts that have resulted in several killings. Boko Haram crisis in the North and the resurgence of Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra and Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in the Southeast and their protests are all examples of religious and ethnic conflicts.

In Nigeria, the issue of Boko Haram has been on since 2002 and it still rages on as at today. All these could be attributed to inability to tolerate ourselves. Religious intolerance is the inability to recognize and accommodate the views and opinion of others about religion.

Nigerian religious adherents especially the Muslims and Christians have demonstrated intolerant attitudes that result in violence. Several attempts have been made by Nigeria government in terms of policies and programmes to bring about national integration such as the National Youth Service Scheme (NYSC), introduction of Unity Schools etc. However, it is disheartening that most of these attempts have fallen far below expectation. Osaghae, Egbosa & Suberu (2005) said Nigeria has been pushed hither and thither by recurrent crises of regional or state illegitimacy, often impairing efforts at economic transformation, democratization, national cohesion and stability. Considering the above, it is necessary to promote religious tolerance and national integration so as to bring people of different races, ethnicity and religious groups into an unrestricted equal association. It is on this note that this paper explores the concepts of religion, religious intolerance, religious tolerance, national integration, peaceful co-existence, adult and non-formal education and the role of adult and non-formal education in promoting religious tolerance and national integration in a country like ours (Nigeria) with diverse religious, ethnic, cultural and political differences.

Concept of Religion, Religious Intolerance and Religious Tolerance

Religion has no universally accepted definition. It can be looked at from different perspectives. For instance Tamara (2013) defines religion as a socio-cultural system of designated behaviours and practices, morals, worldviews, texts, sanctified places, prophecies, ethics or organizations that relate humanity to supernatural transcendental or spiritual elements. Tanner (2007) as cited by Sulaiman (2016) defines religion as a system of symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive and long lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. Haralambos & Holborn (2008) define religion as a unified system of and practices relative to sacred things. The three major religions in Nigeria are with diverse beliefs and faiths with each wanting to uphold their own and this has apparently resulted in violence and conflicts. Religious violence may be described as the outcome of religious intolerance. It is the threat or actual implementation of acts which have potential capacity to inflict physical, emotional or psychological injury on a person or group of persons for religious ends. Religious violence is specifically, violence that is motivated by or in reaction to religious precepts, texts, or doctrines. It is a term that covers phenomena where religion is either the subject or object violent behavior (Wellman & Tokuno, 2004).

Religious intolerance has been identified as the major source of religious violence in multi-religious societies like Nigeria. Sulaiman (2016) citing Balogun (1988) defined religious intolerance as a blind and fixated mental and psychological negative attitude towards religious belief and practices that are contrary to one's own cherished beliefs and practices. The negative attitudes constantly manifest themselves in violent outbursts which stand as a threat to security and peaceful co-existence. It is no longer a new thing in Nigeria to see people of different religious sects being hostile to another. Haldun & Odukoya (2016) confirm that most of the violence is constructed from differences in religious and ethnic nationalism and has led to series of conflicts about control of state power, unequal allocation collapse, economic decline and ethno-religious clashes. In Nigeria, religious tolerance as a means for peace is highly expedient because of the near frequent occurrences of religious strife. Hence, religious tolerance has become a necessity in Nigeria of today if peace must be maintained. Religious tolerance is the willingness to refrain from preventing an individual or

groups of people from expressing their views, opinions and choices on religious matters. It is the willingness to allow one's religious views, beliefs preferences and practices to undergo criticism, for the advancement of knowledge and understanding. Fundamental human rights in Nigeria allow people to make choices on which religion they would practice and such decisions on no account should be intimidated. Chia (2015) defined religious tolerance as the ability to hold on to one's own religion, ability to understand differing religious opinions and views other than one's own without any bias, prejudice or conflict.

Concept of National Integration

The word integration suggests a process of structural linkage between two or more parts of a system or systems. Integration means the bringing of people of different religions, races or ethnic groups into unrestricted and equal associations. Online Legal dictionary defines national integration as the process through which people live within the geographic boundaries of a country, forget their differences of race, religion and language and feel the spirit of unity and allegiance to the nation. National integration describes a situation where citizens of a country increasingly see themselves as one people bound by shared historical experiences and common values and imbued by the spirit of patriotism and unity which transcends traditional primordial diverse tendencies (Jega, 2002). The essence of integration can be discerned from the functionalist view of the society on which Anele (1999) as quoted by Ibaba (2009) said that "functionalism sees human society as a social system comprising sub-units or inter-dependents parts. These sub-units are inter-dependents on each other and are functionally interrelated". This is to say that plural societies, with distinct ethnic nationalities operate as a system that requires each unit for the good of all. Thus, the different ethnic groups, the interrelated and inter-dependent sub-units must function in unity. National integration embodies strategies of forging unity even in diversity. National integration reduces socio-cultural differences and inequalities. It strengthens national unity and solidarity (Osimen, Balogun & Adenegan, 2013)

Concept of Adult and Non-Formal Education

UNESCO (1996) defines Adult Education as the "entire body of organized educational processes whatever the contents, level and method, whether formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, colleges and universities as well as in apprenticeships, whereby persons regarded as adults by the society in which they belong, develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications and bring about changes in their attitude or behavior in the two-fold perspective of independent, social, economic and cultural development". Liveright & Haygood (1968) defined Adult Education as a process whereby persons who no longer attend school on a regular and full-time basis (unless full-time programmes are especially designed for adults) undertake sequential and organized activities with the conscious intention of bringing about changes in information, knowledge, undertakings, or skills, appreciation and attitude or for the purpose of identifying and solving personal or community problems.

According to Aderinoye (2007), adult and non-formal education is an organized and sequential learning experience of adults. To Nzeneri (2005), adult and non-formal education is a means of bringing about positive and progressive change especially among local and downtrodden masses. It is a means to achieve deliberate positive change in the life of an individual, adult or group of adults for improvement in self and community. Ihejerika (2000)

defined Non-Formal Education as any systematic and organized educational activity carried out outside the framework of the formal school system to provide selected type of learning to a particular sub-group in the population, adults. It can therefore be referred to as recurrent learning.

Non-Formal Education (NFE) may be defined as “any organized and sustained educational activity that does not correspond exactly to the formal education systems of schools, colleges, universities, and other formal educational institutions”. It may take place both within and outside educational institutions and cater for persons of all ages. Depending on country contexts, it may cover educational programmes to impart adult literacy, basic education for out-of-school children, life skills, work skills, and general culture. NFE programmes do not necessarily follow the ladder system and may have differing durations and may not confer certification of the learning achieved (Fagunwa, 2014). It can thus be seen as a systematic enterprise that is usually outside the formal school system in which admission criteria, staff, content, media, time units and facilities are adapted for particular students so as to maximize the attainment of their learning objectives to minimize their constraints. Fordham (1993) as cited by Fagunwa (2014) identifies four characteristics of Non-Formal Education as being relevant to the needs of disadvantaged groups, having concern with specific category of persons, flexible in organization and methods and focuses on clearly defined purposes. It is worthy of note that the definitions of adult and non-formal education given above reveal the scope of adult and non-formal education. It involves so many activities of life and embraces all forms of education – formal, non-formal and informal education (Nzeneri, 2005). Some of the forms include citizenship education, peace education, in-service training, community education, and cooperative education to mention but few.

Peaceful Co-existence: A Dream in Nigeria

Peaceful co-existence means living together in a quiet and calm environment devoid of violence, force, war, hostility or killings or shedding of innocent blood. When shall Nigerians’ dream come true? When will blood shedding stop? When shall peace return as it was in the olden days? When shall Nigerian begin to co-exist in peace despite our differences? When will unity return? Who shall take the lead? What will bring back the Nigerian stolen peace? Know fully well that a country devoid of peace would have no meaningful development and they are likely to suffer from retardation and stagnation rather than experience development and progress. This is in line with Alabi (2012) who stated that growth and development in a multi ethnic and diverse nation like Nigeria can only be attained when people co-exist peacefully irrespective of their diverse cultures, ethnic groups, political differences and various religious beliefs.

Role of Adult and Non-Formal Education in Promoting Religious Tolerance and National Integration

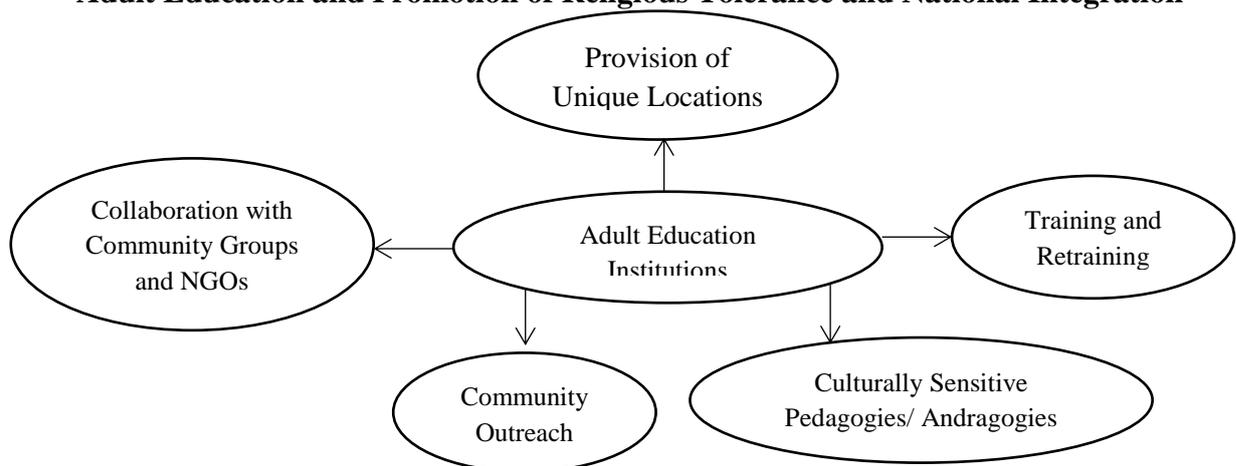
Adult and Non-Formal Education is essential in inculcating discipline in people. The members of the society can be oriented towards peace and tolerance rather than towards violence. Adult and non-formal education provides substantial contribution to personal development, social inclusion, active citizenship and as such it could play a key role in national integration. In fact adult and non-formal education provides an opportunity to promote the values of tolerance and solidarity. Adult and non-formal education could be used

to bring people together from different cultures so that they can meet interact, share opinions and discuss their difference.

Adult education is one of the most effective tools for fostering tolerance. Halachev (2015) pointed out that there are various ways in which non-formal adult education can contribute substantially to a more tolerant society. To the aforementioned author, tolerance is a democratic skill that can be learned and trained. Halachev (2015) further stresses that knowledge about the importance of tolerance and about democracy as well as about the backgrounds of other people can be disseminated through adult education. The existence of a strong and viable adult and non-formal education system can lead to a greater tolerance of diversity. Courses and informal educational activities that deal with the move towards a more diverse society could reduce tensions. Adult education develops initiatives to ensure continuity of solidarity and tolerance. Adult education can be used to create a supportive environment by introducing integration programmes.

There is a huge scope of adult and non-formal education as reflected in part of this study. Adult and non-formal education can be used in promoting citizenship and the values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination

Adult Education and Promotion of Religious Tolerance and National Integration



Source: Adapted from Andrew McCoshan (2019): Adult education and the fight against extremism – Opportunities for action.

Explanation of how Adult and Non- Formal Education can promote Religious Tolerance and National Integration

The diagram above is an illustration of how adult and non-formal education can promote religious tolerance and national integration. Adult and non-formal education institutions can provide unique locations where people from diverse communities can come together thereby creating atmospheres that celebrate diversity as well as individual learning setting. Through adult education, we can reach out to communities in order to promote cohesion by ensuring that programmes put in place are accessible and it must be ensured that they reach out to people from all communities. Through adult and non-formal education, children, youths and adults can acquire social, civic and intercultural competencies by promoting democratic values and fundamental rights, social inclusion and non-

discrimination. Adult and non-formal education can be used to promote intercultural dialogue.

Through collaboration and partnership with communities, groups and NGOs, adult education institutions could build atmospheres and approaches to diversity that is authentic. Adult education institutions must review their curricula, pedagogies and andragogies to suit different cultural backgrounds. Use of active, participating, cooperative education would be most appropriate. Adult educators should be trained and re-trained to deal with diversity in learning settings using culturally sensitive pedagogies that will train them on how to handle prejudice and intolerance.

Conclusion

The paper establishes the fact that there are language, culture, religion, politics and ethnic diversities in Nigeria and that our inability to tolerate ourselves has resulted into dispersion of people, dislocation of community life, destruction of lives and properties, killings, wars, mistrust among people of the same lineage, slowing down of the pace of economic development, instability, fear, anxiety, anarchy and underdevelopment. The paper further pointed out how adult and non-formal education can be used to promote religious tolerance and national integration which in turn promotes co-operation, harmonious living, social change, social life, law and order, brotherliness and good neighbourliness, stability of national life and economic and national development. Finally, the paper recommends what should be done if adult education would be potent to promote religious tolerance and national integration. Let us make our dream of peaceful co-existence come through by playing our part as Nigerian citizens.

Suggestions

1. Public enlightenment and reorientation of the citizens on religious tolerance.
2. Adult education stakeholders should see it as a life-long learning process in which issues of societal concern should be addressed.
3. Adult educators should organize campaigns to the populace in order to combat the prejudices underlying human right abuses
4. Adult educators should be trained and retrained to handle prejudice and tolerance.
5. Curriculum developers must review adult education curricula and pedagogies/andragogies from time to time to suit and address contemporary challenges
6. Adult education must be ready to work hand in hand with communities groups and NGOs.

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