THE ROLE OF MORAL EDUCATION IN CURBING ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CONFLICT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Nigeria is made up of different religious beliefs, ethnic groups, and cultures. The above development has brought various conflicts in the country. Nigeria is a nation known to be a religious country that has so far lost much as a result of ethno-religious conflict rather than gain. This paper seeks to identify the causes of ethno-religious conflict, its effects on Nigerian society, and the role of moral Education in curbing ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria. The country is faced with a lot of challenging issues that threaten the unity of the country. Among these challenges are religious and ethnic conflict. These issues affect the nation politically, economically, etc. Various ethno-religious groups in Nigeria tend to hold on to these differences, therefore making way for conflict, which no doubt has been a threat to the nation. Moral Education has always been a lasting aim of Education. Moral Education is one of the fundamental aspects of human life and society. It is ethical Education to follow a good or evil way of life. Education was not only to make people wise but also to make them morally good.
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Keywords: Moral Education, Ethno-Religious, Conflict, Crisis

Introduction

Nigeria is known to be the most significant black nation with the largest number and most diverse ethnic groups in Africa. Nigeria as a nation has been bedevil by ethnic and religious conflict especially in the northern part of Nigeria. The nation Nigeria has different religious beliefs, ethnic groups and cultures which has led to various conflicts. Nigeria is a country that has so far lost much as a result of ethno-religious differences rather than gain. According to Hamidu (2017), one of the most common problem hampering socio-economic growth and political development is conflict.

Ethno-religious conflict has been a pervasive issue in the societies around the world, leading to untold suffering and violence. Such conflicts arise when tensions between different ethnic or religious groups escalate to a point where violence becomes the only means of expression. In an increasingly diverse global landscape, it is imperative to find effective ways to prevent and minimize such conflicts. One potential solution lies in moral Education, which can play a vital role in curbing ethno-religious conflicts. The role of Moral Education in curbing ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized. This is because Moral

Education is the process of inculcating good moral virtues in to the society. One of the principles of morality is that, the good must be done and the bad thing must be avoided, this means that man have an inherent moral principle to always do the right thing and always avoid the wrong thing. Education as an instrument of inculcating good values should be used to implement morality into the society.

Conflict with it devastating outcome have negative impacts on the general well-being of the country, Nigeria. This affects every sector of the economy which claimed many lives and properties of Nigerians and foreigners and also displays people (Waogu & Akpoghome, 2023). The widespread and recurrence of these conflicts is driven by inadequate governance, corruption, economic inequalities, and leaky borders that facilitate the movement of arms and militants (Abdulrahim et al., 2023).

As it's rightfully said, without peace, no meaningful development can be achieved. According to Akeem and Adeyinka (2012), point to the facts that conflicts continued in the Nigerian society even after the country's independence from the British colonial government. Most northern state in Nigeria such as Kano, Kaduna, Plateau, Borno, Bauchi, Gombe, Adamawa, Taraba, Yobe, Katsina, Nasarawa and others have experience one form of conflict or another which resulted to violence. However, the north is not the only area affected by conflict, but there are also incidences of conflict in eastern part of Nigeria especially the activities of *Bakassi* boys and Indigenous people of Biafra (IPOB) in Aba, Anambra, Enugu, Imo and Onitsha. The activities of these people has caused violence and severe hardship on the people as they declared sit at home order. The activities of *Oduduwa* people congress have contributed to a trend of conflict in Western Nigeria, particularly in Lagos and Ibadan. Several cases of conflict have also been recorded in Warri, Port Harcourt and Yenagoa in the forms of Niger Delta militant attacks on multinational oil companies and kidnappings.

Ethno-religious conflicts are depicted by tensions and violence between groups divided along ethnic and religious lines and have become a very significant challenge in many societies. These conflicts often are from deep-seated prejudices, historical grievances, and a lack of understanding between different communities. The persistence of these conflicts threatens social cohesion, peace, and development. Moral Education, which encompasses teaching values such as tolerance, empathy, respect for diversity, and ethical decision-making, is often proposed as a solution to address these divisions. However, there is a critical need to research the effectiveness of moral Education in actually reducing or preventing ethno-religious conflicts. This study seeks to look at how moral Education can be well employed to curb these conflicts, and whether it can promote a more all-encompassing, peaceful, and harmonious society. The problem lies in determining the extent to which moral Education can influence attitudes and behaviors that contribute to ethno-religious harmony, and identifying the most effective methods for integrating moral Education into educational systems and community programs. This is because moral Education holds the potential to foster empathy, understanding, and acceptance in the society.

The Concept of Conflicts

A conflict is seen as a universal feature of human society. It takes origin in economic differentiation, social change, cultural formation, psychological development and political organization, all of which are inherently conflicting through the formation of conflicting parties, which are perceived to have mutually incompatible goals. This is why Adetoye and Omilusi (2015) states that conflicts entail struggle and rivalry for objects to which individuals and groups attach importance. In the description of components of conflicts. Saiushev (2010) opined that the material objects in relation to conflicts may include scarce resources, such as land, money, employment and position including politics, promotion, the private and public organization. Conflicts are dynamics as they escalate and de-escalate and constituted by a complex interplay of attitudes and behavior that can assume reality of their own. In another vein, Galtung (1967), proposed an influential model of conflicts that encompassed both symmetrical and asymmetrical conflicts. He suggested that conflicts could be viewed as a triangle with contradiction (C), Altitudes (A) and Behaviour (B) as its vertices. All the three components have to be present together in a full conflict. When one observes that life around human, he/she cannot fail to be strike by two facts as a rule, every person desire to have his/her own way to think and acts as he/she likes, and at the same time every one cannot have his/her own way because he/she lives in a society that is filled with people different opinions and attitudes. Man by nature wants to live and interact with other men in order to meet their needs and achieve their heart desires in a given society. However, where and whenever men come together in pursuit of their social, political and economic needs, they must observe the above-stated rules, failure to do so has an effect that leads to bloody clashes in the form of religious wars, terrorism, genocides, cold war etc. Nigeria stands as one of the countries that have been devastated by such conflicts.

Ethno-Religious Conflict

Ethno-religious conflict is the rivalry, battle, confrontation, contention, controversy, clash or quarrel among ethno-religious groups. It is supposedly generated on the basis of real or imagined differences rooted in ethnic and religious ideologies.

Salawu (2010) sees ethno-religious conflict as a situation in which the relationship between various members of ethno-religious groups and multi-religious society is characterized by lack of friendliness, mutual suspicion and fear, which can lead to violent confrontation. In a multi-ethnic and religiously diverse society like Nigeria, relationships between people may be characterized by lack of cordial relationship, mutual suspicion and fear as it is the case among ethno-religious groups in Nigeria. In fact, this mutual suspicion and lack of cordial relationship among the various ethnic components explains why ethno-religious conflicts have become a permanent feature of Nigeria as a nation as far back as 1980s to date. Mohammed (2005) explains that ethno-religious conflicts have claimed many lives and property. This is characterized by destruction of innocent lives in numbers and properties worth billions of naira are either razed by fire or carted away by hoodlums. Salawu (2010) mention these conflicts, such as the *maitatsine* religious disturbances in some parts of the northern Nigeria like Kano and Maiduguri in the early 1980s, Jimeta-Yola religious

disturbances (1984), and Zango Kataf crises in Kaduna State (1992), among many others. This gives us the background that since a long time ago, many parts of Nigeria have become theatres of war, characterized by an increasing number of ethno-religious conflicts. With the coming of democracy ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria has however; increased possibly due to the fact that democracy is characterized by so much freedom.

From the various examples of ethno-religious conflicts cited, it can be seen that there is no sharp distinction between ethnic conflict and religious conflict. What this means is that a Conflict that begins as an ethnic 'conflict may end up as a religious crisis and vice-versa. This explains why ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria are always devastating in their effects.

Factors Responsible for Ethno-Religious Conflict

The factors responsible for ethno-religious conflict in a pluralistic country like Nigeria are very numerous. Hamidu (2017) notes the possible factors that geared ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria as follows:

1. Religious extremists: This is about radical religious teachings by the religious teachers and adherent of various sects.
2. Ethnic and regional hatred among various states of the nation
3. The act of showing favoritism by politicians who exploit religion for their personal benefits.
4. Ignorance or bias of religions by teachers of religion and its adherent of various sects.
5. Favoritism on the part of government towards religion and ethnic tribes creates disunity among people and various sects, and
6. Lack of employment among youth as the famous adage says "an idle man is the devil's workshop."

Furthermore, Ngwoke P. N. and Ituma E. A. posit that the cause of conflicts such as the Maitatsine riots, Kano religious crises, Jos crises and Boko Haram can be associated to religious intolerance. They further quote Onah et al. (2017), that religious intolerance was the major factor instigating violence especially in the Northern Nigeria. They cited previous instances ranging from the Maitatsine riots in 1980 to the Boko Haram uprising. The Maitatsine riots began due to the violent attacks from Mohammed Marwa's (the group leader) followers on other religious groups. They continued to point to religious intolerance by making reference to the Kafanchan mayhem of March 1987, which started in the College of Education over a crusade being organized by Christian students and spread to Funtua, Kaduna Metropolis, Zaria and environs. Omotosho (2003) also agrees that religious extremists pose a threat to religious intolerance as he points to the attacks of Boko Haram, which displayed religious intolerance against the Christian religious group by killing Christians, destroying their place of worship and even raping their women, with the claim that it is a tax paid by Christians under Islamic law (*jizya*). The lack of a genuine desire to tolerate people from a religious group one does not believe in or belong to has made it difficult for people from different ethnic and religious groups to understand each other's belief and culture, hence, this leaves room for the wrong perspective and behavior towards each other.

Ngwoke P. N. and Ituma E. A. also agree that lack of unemployment of youth leads to conflict as the popular saying goes, an ideal man is the devil's workshop. Lack of water and land resources is equally one of the reasons for most ethnic conflict in Nigeria (Olagunju et al., 2021). This has led to clashes between herders and recurrent bloody clashes between the Fulani herders who are looking for pastures for their livestock and their host community. The problem of ethno-religious conflict and the factors that triggered it involves the decision of the government and the religious leaders, among others.

Effects of Ethno-Religious Conflict on the Nigerian Society

Aibangbe (2017) opines that conflicts are desirable in shaping human ideologies and relationships, but they occur with negative consequences. The adverse effects of conflict on the Nigerian society are enormous. They are over all sector of the Nigerian economy. Conflicts breed insecurity, discrimination, mutual distrust, poor economy and educational development. It leads to unjustified killings and mutilation of people in thousands and destruction of property worth billions of naira. This is evidently seen in places like Jos, Nasarawa, Gombe, Borno etc. many lives lost and the loss of properties worth millions. All these are being wasted in the name of religion that is supposed to be the opium of the masses as supposed by Karl Max.

Religion in the Nigerian society has done more harm than good. Hamidu (2017) state that in spite of the positive social and spiritual functions of religion, there is the negative aspect of it. In Nigeria, especially in the northern state, religious conflict had led to the dead of thousands and destruction of properties worth millions of naira. The influence of religion in election pattern and appointment of persons in some political positions or cadre tend to have either stop the person from being recruited, elected or appointed. Religion also hinders structural developments like building of places of worship and religious schools and other faith base facilities in some places due to religious differences or intolerant reasons. Religion in Nigeria encourages and promotes social disunity, this is because Christian and Muslims always fight and suspect each other without reason to the harm of socio-economic and political development of Nigeria as a nation.

Olabintan (2018) state that one major repercussion of religious conflict on the economic development of Nigeria is the reputation of Nigeria in the international community. This is because many sees Nigeria as a terrorist nation, which affects Nigeria's business men and women who travel out of the country. The fears of been victims of this wicked act makes it difficult to invest in Nigerian, hence reduce the economic development of Nigeria. People venture in to businesses for gain, not loss, even though risk is unavoidable in business ventures, at the same time wisdom is profitable to direct. Furthermore, religious and ethnic conflict affects the foreign direct investment flow in to Nigeria. He further explains that religious and ethnic conflict damages resources and facilities which was acquired over time. This is rightly said, no foreign investor will like to invest funds in a country that is divided in terms of communal, religious and ethnic conflict. Ethno-Religious conflict also deprived the nation of needed man power and services for the growth of its economy. It also affects the educational sector ranging from closing of schools during such conflict, destruction of school

facilities to abduction and raping of school children as in the case of Chibok girls that were abducted by Boko Haram.

The Concept of Moral Education

Moral Education is as old as the society. The word moral comes from a Latin word "mos or moris" which means code or customs of a people, the social manner that defines how individuals should live together (Britannica Vol.8). Moral Education is one of the fundamental aspect of human life and the society. It can also be said to be the ethical Education to follow good or bad way of life. Moral Education consist of some basic principles like honesty, truthfulness, kindness, sympathy etc. It is an act of inculcating those virtues and moral values which help individuals to live a good life and be responsible citizens of their community (Fafunwa, 1976). This definition entails that moral Education does not only benefit the student but the society. It brings about social orderliness in the society. Moral Education is considered as a process via which relevant knowledge, attitudes, values, and skills are transferred and developed in children (Barry, 1985). It concerns the practices and ways that socializing agents use to mould children with the resources to tackle issues about what is right and wrong in their everyday life. For Nsirim (2006), moral Education is the means in which man is being helped to form good and develop character, imbibe useful experiences and pursue skills and capabilities that enable him to lead functional and harmonious moral life as a member of a social group or society. This implies that moral Education helps people to be productive and contributing members of their respective society. It focuses on the development of cognitive, social and emotional skills which are necessary for moral thinking, action and feeling. Uche and Amakiri (2017) quote Aminigo (1999), who sees moral Education as all the educational and institutional arrangements made by a society to improve the independent moral development of the child. This entails that moral Education is a deliberate effort taken by the society for its betterment. They further emphasize that moral Education is not just a formal classroom instruction but it includes those given by parents, elders and society in general, in a non-formal setting like the family, clubs or age groups.

Morality is the development of a person within a particular social setting. It is widely accepted as a part of socialization process which is generally meant to prepare students for a happy and productive life as a member of the community. Moral Education is the inculcation of desirable values, norms, attitudes approved by the society in order to have a good citizen in the future. Uche and Amakiri (2017), points that having been exposed to these desirable values, norms and attitudes, man takes a decision on maintaining to that which would ensure his permanency, continuity and stability in the society not just for his personal interests alone but in the wider and overall interest of society without which he stand alone. In the light of this definition moral education is seen as a tool in curbing ethno-religious conflict in the Nigerian society. Some institution of learning, like the prestigious Gombe State University award their degree programs for character and learning. This point to the importance of moral or character Education as Omoregbe, (2000) rightfully said that to educate an individual in mind and not in morals, is to educate a menace in the society. This place the importance of

moral Education in the society that cannot be overlooked because of the disastrous consequences.

Ilori (2013) points that the following general educational goals points towards Moral Education, which are;

1. To assist the students to build up a good sense of direction in life and to attain a valid perspective
2. To assist the students to gain positive attitudes and encourage the growth of faith in which to travel through life. and
3. To develop the student's cognitive, affective, psychological and psychomotor domains.

These educational goals point to the fact that moral Education can be used to curb this menace of ethnic and religious conflict in our society via Education.

One key aspect of moral Education is its ability to cultivate empathy. When individuals are instilled with moral values from an early age, they gain an understanding of the experiences and perspectives of others. This empathetic understanding helps break down barriers and categories that fuel ethno-religious conflicts. Through moral Education, individuals learn to appreciate the diversity of cultures and religions, leading to a more harmonious coexistence. By recognizing the shared human experience, moral Education encourages individuals to view ethno-religious groups as equals, encouraging mutual respectful interaction. Furthermore, moral Education instils the values of tolerance and acceptance. By teaching about different religions, cultures, and ethnicities, individuals learn to embrace diversity and celebrate differences. Moral Education enables young people to recognize the intrinsic value of all human beings, regardless of their ethnic group or religious background, leading to a more inclusive society. When people are taught to see similarities instead of differences, the seed of ethno-religious conflict can be nipped in the bud. This does not only benefit individuals on a personal level but also establishes a foundation for peaceful coexistence on a societal level.

Another crucial aspect of moral Education is its ability to promote critical thinking and rational decision-making. Conflicts often arise due to misinformation, prejudice, and distorted beliefs. Through moral Education, individuals learn to question their own biases and critically examine information before forming judgments. By encouraging a rational and empathetic approach to decision-making, moral Education equips individuals with the tools to resist the manipulation of extremist ideologies and propaganda that often perpetuate ethno-religious conflicts. By reflective mind-set, moral Education empowers individuals to challenge divisive narratives and seek common ground for peaceful resolution. Furthermore, moral Education can foster a sense of civic responsibility. By emphasizing the importance of fairness, justice, and cooperation, individuals are more likely to engage in acts of social cohesion and community building. Through moral Education, individuals develop a strong sense of duty towards their fellow citizens, regardless of their ethno-religious background. this sense of responsibility can help prevent ethno-religious conflicts by promoting open dialogue, intercultural understanding, and the development of shared goals and values. By

encouraging active participation in the wider community, moral Education can create a social structure that withstands the tensions and divisions that fuel ethno-religious conflicts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the role of moral Education in curbing ethno-religious conflict cannot be understated. Through the cultivation of empathy, tolerance, critical thinking, and civic responsibility, moral Education provides the necessary foundation for peaceful coexistence. By instilling moral values from an early age, societies can work towards mitigating the barriers that cause ethno-religious conflicts. It is crucial for governments, educators, and communities to recognize the importance of moral Education and allocate resources to promote its implementation. By doing so, we can envision a future where ethno-religious conflicts are minimized and societies thrive in harmony and acceptance.

Recommendations

1. There should be readiness to respect and appreciate our ethnic and religious differences.
2. Moral Education should be made compulsory at all levels of learning, this will help in inculcating desirable values, norms, and attitudes approved by the society in order to have good citizens in the future.
3. Religious, political and traditional leaders should strictly teach their tenets to minimize ethno-religious bigotry.
4. The government and various religious bodies in Nigeria should organized seminars, conferences and workshops that center on promoting moral Education, where trained religious leaders, traditional rulers, scholars, and other professionals would assist in propagating an anti-violence campaign.
5. The outcome of these seminars and conferences should be implemented by the government

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