

EDUCATION FOR CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS: A PANACEA FOR ETHNOCENTRISM IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Ethnicity is a strong belief based on cultural sentiment. This belief does not allow a person to appreciate others, it blocks the believer from being reasonable and objective toward trying to evaluate other ethnic groups. These sentiments are most nursed by our political leaders for the purpose of achieving their personal interests. But such positions are detrimental to the unity, progress and development of our societies and communities, especially in Nigeria situations where many crises have resulted in the loss of properties and lives. Hence the need to call for an educational programme that will create or develop critical consciousness of our citizens, to be able to withstand the ethnic calls of our self-directed leaders. This type of education should reflect issues of critical thinking, analysis, judgment, negotiation and so on. This will develop or cultivate in our citizens the habits of assessing their situations before taking decisions.

Introduction

This paper has five component parts, each appropriately tailored into others. The first section examined the state of ethnocentrism in Nigeria by highlighting the ethnic practices that are so much problematic for national integration and development. The second section examined the role of elites in perpetuating ethnics, as well as the use of the masses as ethnic armour for the protection of the vested interest of the elites. Thirdly, the spirit of consciousness is explicated. Fourthly, the education for developing critical

consciousness was advocated. This education if realized, would lead Nigerian society into development and integration. Finally, some recommendations were proffered for the realization of the objectives of such education.

The State of Ethnocentrism in Nigeria

According to Chambers Dictionary, ethnocentrism is a belief in the superiority of one's own cultural group or society and corresponding dislike or misunderstanding of other such groups. It is in the light of this explication that ethnocentrism is pictured as act of imprisoning amour which prevents men living in one society from loving one another. Similarly, it can be seen as the greatest tragedy of modern men who are manipulated by ethnic socialization as well as dominated by the forces of ethnic myths. This mythical domination mostly culminates into the destruction or annihilation of personal reasoning capacities, especially the objective critical and rational proficiencies used in evaluating or assessing other ethnic groups. Hence, this tragically frightened men from seeking authentic co-existence or even make them doubt the possibility for such existence. Consequently, the ethnic grouping and regroupings are orchestrated in order to bring about balancing against one another.

Looking at the formative stage of Nigerian society, this pattern or structure of ethnocentrism is basically predominant, during the struggle for, and the primal state of Nigeria when it witnessed the emergence of different forms of ethnocentrism. This was particularly orchestrated by the statements or utterances and political socialization of the then prominent political leaders, namely Sir Ahmadu Bello, Dr. Nnamidi Azikwe and Chief Obafemi Awolowo. Some of their utterances no doubt germinated into or gave roots to ethnocentric practices in Nigeria today. For instance, Azikwe in Coleman (1984) was quoted as say at the Igbo conference of 1949 that:

It would appear that the God of Africa has specially created Igbo nation to lead the children of Africa from the bondage of the ages. The material prowess of the stages of human history has enable them not to only conquer others but also to adapt themselves to the role of the preserver. The Igbo nation cannot shirk its responsibility.

Similarly, Bello in Ejogu (1995) was quoted as saying that:

If the British quit Nigeria now at this stage, the Northern propel would continue their uninterrupted conquest to the sea.

In the same vein, Chief Awolowo remarked that:

In embracing Western culture, the Yoruba's take the lead and have benefited immensely as a result. The Efiks, the Ijaws, the Ibiobios and the Igbos came next. The last four named are particularly ambitious and doing all they can to overtake, the Yoruba's. The Hausas and the Fulanis on the other hand are extremely conservative and take reluctant to Western civilization.

These forgoing statements made by these national figures of their time and icons of their ethnic groups were most likely to develop contempt in the people that are not from their respective ethnic groupings as well as create misunderstanding, encourage dysfunctional loyalties and exacerbate political tension. Hence, these situations might have led to the present nature of loose national unity thereby constituting hindrance to national consciousness and commitment. This kind of mutual mistrust among ethnic groups is exemplified in the political process of party formation and socializations. For instance party formations at the inception of the First Republic up to the present political arrangements were based on ethnic groupings. For example, NPC was dominantly Hausa/Fulani, NCNC Igbo dominated; AG Yoruba dominated. The Second Republic saw NPP being Igbo dominant; NPN- Hausa/Fulani dominated. UPN- Yoruba dominance, APP- Northern dominance.

In the area of officer sharing at national and state levels, there are ethnocentric practices. For instance, Federal and State appointments (e.g. Federal Ministries, State Commissioners, Vice Chancellors and so on) are mostly done on ethnic basis in the name of ethnic balancing or quota system. According to Adewole (1987), this practice, of ethnically balancing government appointments cannot lead to national unity and understanding.

Similarly, the problems of ethnocentrism had led some sections of Nigerians, at one time or another, into varied kinds of destructive conflicts, clashes and even wars in the past. Most of these ethnic violence resulted into inestimable loses of properties and lives. These consequently worsened and deepened the strained ethnic relations and promote disunity. Vengeance missions planned against each other resulted in violent inter-tribal clashes in recent years in Nassarawa, in Jos, in Kaduna, in Odi, in Rivers State, Shagamu, Lagos crisis and several other places too numerous to list here.

In another dimension, ethnocentrism in Nigeria has created serious social dislocations among its citizens. For instance, there is no doubt that some of our social mistrust, social

disrespect, social misunderstanding and social underrating and so on, are consequences of ethnic practices. These social dislocations are not only found among the major ethnic groups but also the minority ones. Such social ills no doubt, block mutual understanding, interpersonal relationship, respect for persons, and regard for other cultures. These relations are not only traceable to our economic system and governmental organization but also to the levels of personal commitments, effectiveness and productivity throughout the hooks and crannies of the country.

Elitism and Massification Of Masses

Looking at the catalogue of ethnic problems highlighted above and observing the visible negative effects on progress and unity of Nigerian society, it will be imperative to juxtapose this situation to our process of education and elitism. In this manner, we may be tempted to ask whether our current process of educating is adequate enough to produce citizens that are capable of fighting ethnic practices in our society.

In this Respect, we may raise doubt if our present educational process can ever produce citizens that would have the abilities and training to be able to phase out ethnocentrism in Nigeria. This is because our educational delivery system is based on indoctrination and banking processes, where little or no chances of critical processes are allowed. Moreover, the contents lay more emphasis on facts than on reflective thinking: which basically assume the patterns of ethnic socialization. Therefore, the products of the educational system may not have the expected abilities and training to face the challenges of ethnicity. So it becomes easier for our elites to tailor themselves within the ethnic umbrella than to fight the ills embedded in the ethnic practices. Consequently, the elites, who we may regarded as ethnic chauvinists. Mostly perpetuate their positions through sharp political practices and massification of the masses as ethnic amours or vanguards. Hence, the elites, in their efforts to protect their vested interest, domesticate the illiterates and semi-illiterate masses, so to say in defense of their ethnic positions. By this means, the Nigerian masses are made ethnic scapegoats. Therefore, a better direction in educational programmes must be proffered to reverse the roles of our elites to be able to lead the masses against ethnocentric practices. Here, therefore, the calls for education for critical consciousness become imperative.

The Critical Consciousness

Consciousness is a prime mover and factor in human behaviour and action. The critical spirit is the defined sensibility, reasonability, intelligibility and positivism in such behaviour and action. In this case, critical consciousness is a necessary proficiency for

proper evaluation of situations, happenings and statements involved in human social and interactive life. A critically conscious person should then have the dispositions, habits of mind and character traits rooted in reason. In the light of this explanation, Siegel (1988) postulated that "in training our students to reason in their judgment, we train them to be critical". On the same note, Dewey in David (1991) posits that the critical spirit is in the state of doubt, hesitation, perplexity, mental difficulty, inquiring to find material that will resolve the doubt, settle and dispose of the perplexity.

Similarly, by way of functions, a critically conscious citizen should be well-informed with respect to all matters of act, to grasp fully the nature of democratic principles and practices and to fully embrace his responsibility and to treat his fellow democrats as equal partners in political, social and economic lives. The citizens should be capable of examining public concern, judge intelligently all issues facing his society and challenge them, as well as seek reasons for proposed changes. In the process, he should display great deal of imagination, understanding of people's opinions, be flexible and being emancipated from stereotype was of thinking.

Education for Developing Critical Consciousness: A Panacea for Ethnocentrism in Nigeria

In this avocation, the expected contribution of education is if not a birth of new society, at least a serious modification through the development of critical attitudes among Nigerians. In this case, we hope to advance the present status of naïve consciousness that is hardly differentiated from ethnocentrism to the critical transitivity, and to increase Nigerians' ability to perceive and withstand the challenges of political chauvinists.

In this case, what is to be developed does not stop at the ability to exercise the critical attributes alone, but the willingness to conform to judgments and actions to principles as well as to assess reason properly and well too. This suggests that a person should be able to question not only the beliefs and commitments of others but also challenge his won beliefs and commitments, until they stand the test of reason. In this respect, education is to develop such skills in the areas a person is most likely to have ego-centric and socio-centric biases. This is because the teaching of these forms of thinking is to improve human understanding and exert some control over the social environment rationally.

Hence, our educational endeavours should inculcate in the learner the spirit and the zeal to improve his ability to think logically, critically and reflectively, as well as the inclination to do so through an organized means. Such organized means could be the abilities or competencies to structures objectives examine opportunities appraise

alternatives, specify and created attributes to measure the achievability of goals, analyze problems and identify useful information. Consequently, the efforts at developing these attributes through education imply getting the learner to act intelligently, ready to reflect, detect, and correct lapses in his educational activities, which is a preparation for real life situation. The learner should be engaged in the act of adequate and systematic analysis, judgment, criticism and synthesis of information, data, events, ideas, and systems. This equally suggests that every item of learning either fact or idea will undergo scrutiny by querying, negotiating meaning, posing, questions, justifying or falsifying arguments, checking, modifying, altering, being aware of different approaches, and being willing to shift ground and renegotiate and changing direction. These, values could be developed through the teaching of such subjects as sciences, social sciences and even humanities where man's capacities for social bargaining are the focus.

In this dimension, educational activities should be planned according to mental capacity of the learner as well as age limit. This is to say that learning activities should take into cognizance the primary stages, the secondary stages and the higher levels systematically. In each component of these stages, the problems of slow learners, average learners and even fast learners should be adequately catered for. Hence, there is need for individualistic learning programming.

Similarly, the educator should provide adequate guide to these activities, as well as rules, Models, proceedings and material. He should also create a good environment for smooth practices and should be in control of his field of knowledge, especially in relating one activity to another, as well as one discipline to another and generally to the problems of our societies. In the same vein, the educator should guide his learners against fallacies barriers and implications involved in developing and acquiring effective skills, attitudes and habit of logical critical and reflective thinking. Such barriers towards acquiring these proficiencies include the predigested thinking or fixed opinions, unwarranted assumptions, premature evaluation habits thoughts.

Alongside the development of critical skills is the education of emotions. In this case, learning should consist of acquiring moral rules and concepts, honesty, faithfulness, keeping promise and so on. The process of educating emotion may be more effective through:

1. Sensitivity development which involves close feelings and sympathetic relations with one another. Here, we stress the emotional learning of individual learner in group.

2. Learning the virtues of self control. This is acquiring the attributes of patience, perseverance and tendencies of pursuing things that are worthwhile.
3. Development of positive affective emotions, such as love, sympathy, happiness, joy, concern, compassion.
4. Development of attributes of more responsibility, such as dutifulness, rightfulness, moral moderation.

The objective of developing critical skills in the learner is to transform his mode of thinking from more or less casual curiosity and sporadic suggestions into attitudes of alertness, cautiousness and through inquiring.

Recommendations

There is the need to either review or update or both, the national Policy on Education. This is because, some aspects of our national Policy in Education are vague and ambiguous about what they intend to achieve, how they intend to achieve them, hence, the problematic positions of their scopes, limitations and concentration. One of such aspects is "Faith in man's ability to make rational decision" (section one paragraph 3 number two). This objective is vague in its present position for educational pursuit, because it connotes positive and negative behaviours such as planning for people's progress and development or planning to dupe, rob, steal divert and so on. Therefore, to be able to make sense of what rational decision means. There is a need for adequate conceptual clarification of the terms involved by way of specifying the nature principles and methods of the desired rational decision as a focus of educational programme. Other objective that has similar problem which is geared towards developing consciousness is "laying a basis of scientific and reflective thinking" (section three paragraphs 14b). This objective is problematic in its present position for educational operation, as applied to the content of rational decision making.

2. Curricular Improvement: Our curricular content and delivery should not be focused on facts alone, where memorization capacity is targeted, neglecting the vital aspects of human qualities, such as thinking and reasoning capacities. In this respect, we suggest the adoption of Paul Hirst (1974) and Philip Phenix (1958) forms and domains of knowledge as constituting curriculum. They postulate that knowledge of curricular content is categorized as follows:
 - a. Factual knowledge
 - b. Aesthetic knowledge
 - c. Ethical knowledge

At the fractural level of knowledge, the concentration is on the physical information, ideas and theories that constitute such subject. The aesthetic level relates the facts, ideas and theories to issues of beauty; pleasant science and so on. Similarly the ethical knowledge relates factual levels to the process of reasoning, thinking, judging, and evaluating situation and events. Overall, this is to suggest that in each subject, for instance science learning has its foundation in an intimate connection with any thorough and critical inquiry, in every day affairs which must be concurrently presented with the facts of science. It is this sense of presenting science that can develop certain human qualities, of critical consciousness.

Similarly, the acquisition of historical knowledge should be accompanied with morality and reasoning in the historical events, not just the facts alone. The acquisition of mathematical knowledge should be accompanied with the development of critical and logical reasoning capacities not only accumulating formula. Basically, the activities of curricula should involve the processes of reasoning to sort out the relevant or irrelevant facts, ideas and the morality of considering various ideas, facts or forms of knowledge, the criteria for judging the proposition of truth, as well as the attitudes involved in the evaluation of various ideas and facts. Hence, our curricula must reflect all these processes of the development of critical consciousness.

3. **Improving Teaching Strategies:** Our educators should be aware that the teaching strategies are not only aimed at delivering mere facts to the learners, but are also concerned with the development of learner's potentials. In this respect, our educators should have a deliberate plan for making sure that the relevant learner's potentials to be developed within a specific discipline or topic are adequately attended to here and now. Consequently, educator's strategic planning for teaching should not be concerned with mere facts alone but also trying to pin down which particular learner's potentials are target.

Those potentials which could be developed through relevant teaching strategies include the mental ability, the power of thought modesty, independence, logical thinking foresight, creativity, respect and consideration for person responsible behaviour, fairness in value judgment, emotional control, patience, understanding, sharing and so on, all of which are geared towards the sense of critical consciousness of a person. Nigerian educators must be aware of this important position in educational activities if our dream of developing critical conscious Nigerians is to be realized.

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