

THE IMPACT OF ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CRISES ON EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE EDUCATIONAL GOALS

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Abstract

Education is a fundamental right, so also is security. The two are interdependent. While education needs security for school enrolment, attrition and retention, education on the other hand is the potent tool for the eradication of ignorance, violence and insecurity in the society. The importance of education is recognized globally as a tool of empowerment for all citizens to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic, or religious groups. Since 1960, the Nigerian educational system has not been able to promote peace, tolerance, understanding and friendship due to ethno-religious crises, with devastating consequences on growth and development of the nation. These have in turn rendered the learning and teaching environment unfriendly, making it impossible to provide unhindered basic education to the citizenry. As a result, the laudable educational policies and goals, especially the United Nations Millennium education goals and the Education For All (EFA) objectives are difficult to attain in Nigeria.

Introduction

The constitution of Nigeria gives all citizens the right to education. But the delivery of education in Nigeria has suffered from years of neglect, compounded by inadequate attention to policy frameworks within the sector (National Planning Commission, 34). Today, the problem of education is not about poor teaching methods or unqualified teachers, acute shortages of infrastructure and faculties, gender issues or socio-cultural beliefs and practices, the problem of education in Nigeria is insecurity posed by incessant crises caused by ethno-religious conflicts. The right to education is fundamental as education is the fulcrum of effective realization of human rights. According to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) 2008:107 states that

“The right to education is fundamental as it is the fulcrum of effective realization of human rights. It is the foundation upon which the effective actualization of human rights rest. For education to be qualitative, it must be able to lead to sustainable development”.

The importance of the right to education is recognized by legal instruments both internationally, regionally and nationally. For example, section 18 of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, states that (1) Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels. (3) Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy and to this end, government shall as and when practicable provide:

- a. Free, compulsory and universal primary education;
- b. Free secondary education
- c. Free university education
- d. Free adult literacy programme (29)

Nigeria's international obligations are guided by the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 26 of which provides *inter alia*, that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality, maintenance of peace strengthening respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Article 13 of which provides *inter alia* that:

state parties recognize the right of everyone to education. Education as a tool of empowerment for all citizens to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups". (NHRC, 2003:08).

At the regional level, the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights of the Organization of African Union (OAU) now African Union, which came into force in June 1981, Article 17(1) states that "every individual shall have the right to education (Olanmi, 2007:31).

As laudable as these instruments may appear, Nigeria is far from achieving these objectives without adequate peace and security of life and property in the country. As observed by Ayandokun 2010:58 "in this part of the world (Nigeria), thousands have lost their lives in ethno-religious crises for decades".

It is the contention of this paper that for education to attain its goals and targets, for sustainable development, there must be peace and security of life and property in the country. And the teaching and learning environment must be safe and conducive, and the safety of both teachers and learners ensured at all levels. The focus of this paper is on the impact of ethno-religious conflicts on education. Because without peace, education being the foundation of development cannot attain its developmental goals.

Conceptual Clarification Education

Education has been defined by authors in their own ways. As a dynamic concept, education is viewed from different perspectives. Farrant (1941) quoted by Abdus-Salam (2015:82) sees education as "a universal phenomenon indulged in by societies which embraces all levels of development by which knowledge is imparted through training for skill acquisition. While Ukeje (1986:3) defines education as a process of developing the individual physically, mentally, spiritually, morally and socially for his own welfare and for the welfare of the society".

This paper adopted Kayode Esho's definition of education which captures it thus "education is the process through which the intellectual and moral capacities of

an individual are developed so as to make him a cultured member of his society” (Eso, 2008:148).

Ethnicity

The Webster’s New World Dictionary defined ethnic as “Designating of any of the basic groups or divisions of mankind or of a heterogeneous population, as distinguished by customs, characteristics language etc”.

(David, B.F 1975:257). While the Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English equally defined ethnic as “pertaining to race, ethnological; when ethnicity originating from a specified racial, linguistic etc (Fowler and Fowler P.356).

According to Sam Egwu (quoted by Ali (2002:73), ethnicity is a phenomena which could be deciphered by five major characteristics , which he listed as contextual discrimination that is “we versus them” syndrome, conflict generation, political phenomenon with the attendant “authoritative allocations of values”, close interaction between ethnicity and religion and lastly flexibility and situational characters.

Ethnic group on the other hand according to Alubo refers to the people who share a common ancestral identity, language and culture. It is simultaneously a process of naming self, naming others, as well as being named by others. Ethnic group members may share diverse religions such as Christianity, Islam and African religion (Alubo, 2008:5).

Religion

Religion, like other primordial identities is difficult to define. Depending on the field of study, it is seen in different ways. There is no clear consensus on the conception of religion by theologians, anthropologists and sociologists and even political scientists. According to theologians, “religion is the essence and core of civilization and the sublime aesthetic expression and the ground for all decisions, actions and ultimate explanation of civilization with its invention and artifacts, its social, political and economic system its past and future promises in history (Muazam, 1997:3).

Isokun on the other hand sees religion as a regulated pattern of life of a people in which experiences, beliefs and knowledge reflected or are repeated in man’s conception of himself in relation to others, his social world. The physical as well as metaphysical world (quoted in Ali, 2002:80). Religion is a unification of a being with his/her creator. It reflects on the organization of his/her world when the individual realizes that he/she has a duty to account for their deeds on earth in the hereafter.

Bangura (1994:15) viewed religion from two related yet distinct ways. First, material sense which “includes the religious establishment (institutions and officials) as well as social groups and movements whose operations are within religious concerns”. Second, the spiritual sense, “this pertains to models of social and individual behaviours that help believers to organize their everyday lives. In this sense, religion has to do with the idea of transcendence, i.e. supernatural realities:

with sacredness, i.e. language and practice that organize the world in terms of what is deemed holy and with ultimacy”.

Ethno-religious crises otherwise called civil disturbances refer to campaigns for citizenship rights and opportunities in which groups – ethnic or religious identify other groups as enemies and embark on violence either for their physical elimination or to force relocation from a particular geopolitical space. It is essentially a form of ethnic, religious and/or citizenship contestation. Typically, it entails violence and associated processes of burning and looting. So defined, “civil disturbance is a form of communal conflict, although the later could set communities who share the same identities such as ethnic and religious affiliations against each other (Nnoli and Imobighe 2003) in Aluba (2008:4).

Since 1980s, Nigeria has experienced series of ethno-religious clashes particularly in Northern and Middle belt or North Central regions and indeed the whole of Nigeria, often with very grave consequences on the entire nation. Hussaini Abdu has traced the beginning of ethno-religious crises thus “ethno-religious crises started Kaduna state in the 1980s. A number of bloody conflicts with specific ethno-religious character were recorded in the state” (2000, 118). Giving reasons for the sources of these crises, Ali (2012:98) has blamed religious crises thus “after all aggravated differences are more of socio-economick and with political undertones and not basic issues of religion. While the cause of ethnic crises in our body polity was put on the diverse nature of our composition ethnically by Oyebanji thus:

Nigerians are said to be composed of about 350 ethnic groups. Only four of which constitute more than 60% of the total population of the country... Not unexpected therefore minority protests and suspicious relationship have always been the order of the day so much so that now and always political parties have often been organized on ethnic lines (quoted in (Ali 2002:104).

Today, Nigeria is facing many challenges in addition to religion and ethnicity and they include among others:

- Religious security problems
- Political security problems
- Economic security problem
- Food security problems
- Social security problems
- Family security problems
- Ethnic security problems

In all of these problems, religion and ethnicity have wreaked more havoc on the nation that all the other problems put together.

Nigerian Educational Policies and Goals

Education is the most important instrument of change. Any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an

educational revolution or reform. Nigeria, as a nation has in the past found compelling reasons to embark upon some education reforms. According to Okonkwo (2013:308).

“The role of education in the transformation of societies is acknowledged by everyone. Education has been used and still being used by societies all over the world as an instrument par excellence to bring about socio-economic transformation. The Nigerian society cannot be exempted from such movement as part of government’s resolve to bring about change. This partly explains why education becomes conspicuous in all National Development plans. The NEPAD, NEEDs and the most recent, the seven (7) point agenda of the Federal Government are part of this resolve to use education to bring about change.

The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) recognises education as the vital transformational tool and a formidable instrument for socio-economic empowerment. The education sector has responsibility for producing and supplying the personnel required to propel and sustain the NEEDS initiative. The goals of wealth creation, employment generation, poverty reduction, and value reorientation can be effectively pursued, attained and sustained only through an efficient, relevant and functional education system. Education is critical to meeting the goals set by NEEDS. It is also a sector that the initiative seeks to reform. The overall polity thrust of NEEDS in education is to:

- Provide unhindered access to compulsory universal basic education to all citizens as a bridge to the future socio-economic transformation of Nigerian society.
- Establish and maintain enhanced quality and standards through relevant, competency-based curricula and effective quality control at all levels.
- Enhance the efficiency, resourcefulness and competence of teachers and other educational personnel through training, capacity building and motivation.
- Strengthen Nigeria’s technological and scientific base by revamping technical, vocational and entrepreneurial education and making optimal use of information and communication technologies to meet the economy’s manpower needs.
- Provide an enabling environment and stimulate the active participation of the private sector, civil society organizations, communities and development partners in educational development.

Needs Educational Goals

- To ensure and sustain unhindered access to education for the total development of the individual.
- To improve the quality of education at all levels.
- To use education as a tool for improving the quality of life through skill acquisition and job creation for poverty reduction.
- To ensure periodic review and effective implementation of the curriculum at the secondary level to meet the requirements of higher education and the world of work.

- To mobilize and develop partnership with the private sector and local communities to support and fund education.
- To promote information and communication technology capabilities at all levels.

Each of these goals have key strategies for achieving (National Planning Commission (2004: pp38-39). The education for All (EFA) goals include:

- Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.
- Ensuring that by 2015, all children particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities have access to free and compulsory primary education of good quality.
- Ensuring that the learning need of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes.
- Achieving a 50 percent improvement in all levels of adult literacy by 2015 especially for women and continuing education for all adults.
- Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2015 with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to achievement in basic education of good quality.
- Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all especially literacy, numeracy and essential life skills (Ebenebe, 2007) cited in Oyesikun (2015: Pp 274-275).

In response to these goals and world initiatives, Nigeria government in 2004 adopted the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). Nigeria as a nation has formulated its own National goals of education, these are outlined in five concise themes. According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) (2004), these National Educational Goals are the building of:

- i. a free and democratic society;
- ii. a just and egalitarian society;
- iii. a united, strong and self-reliant nation;
- iv. a great and dynamic economy; and
- v. a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens

In support of the above stated goals of education in Nigeria, the National Policy on Education has stated the objectives of education to be achieved by the recipients or learners. These include:

- a. The inculcation of national consciousness and national unity
- b. The inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of individual and the Nigerian society.
- c. The training of the mind in the understanding of the world around; and

- d. The acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society.

There is a relationship between achieving National Educational goals and the security of life and property occasioned by a peaceful society. Achievement of security is a *sine qua non* for any person, home, organization and country. It is highly prized by people and nations all over the world. Without the security of life and property, a nation is at risk and is vulnerable to danger or attack.

For Nigeria to facilitate the achievement of the goals and objectives stated above, peace and security have a significant role to play. But unfortunately for Nigeria, ethno-religious crises has not allowed the country to achieve its developmental goals, of which education is the corner stone. Nigeria has had a fair share of ethno-religious crises with high casualty rate both human and material. Authors have enumerated the origin, sources and types of conflicts in Nigeria, which is not the focus of this paper.

However, most of the crises seem to be located in the North and North-Central zones of Nigeria. For instance, Jibrin Ibrahim of International Human Rights Law Group (2002, vii – xx) summarised the problem of Nigeria thus:

The mosaic of identity profiles in Nigeria is vast, complex and multi-dimensional. At least three tendencies can be defined. The first is the North/South divide that emerged at the beginning of the colonial period. The second is the tripolar framework related to the three colonial regions and the majority groups that dominated each region the third and indeed the most important tendency in Nigerian politics is a persistent multi-polarity based on a very large number of minority groups, which has historically been repeatedly repressed with imposed bipolarity and or tri-polarity but has managed to survive. The level of religiosity in Nigerian society has been growing in a remarkable manner over the past two decades. This is expressed in the multiplication of religious authorities, texts, discourses and identities. Growth is expressed both in the intensity of beliefs and in the expansion of time resources and efforts devoted to religious practices. The explanation for thus is linked to the fact that the norms and practices of the growing number of religious movements and their activism is characterised by norms that are often antithetical to democratic ones. They include sectarian and exclusiveness, intolerance and a propensity to have speech and undemocratic organizational practices (XV).

Alemika on the other hand has identified several types of conflict in Nigeria to include ethnic, economic, religious and political disputes. But points out that it is difficult to isolate which conflicts are primarily engendered by economic, ethnic,

religious and political competitions because the factors are intertwined. He identified two fundamental factors which are responsible for conflicts:

The first and most important factor is scarcity of resources and the struggle to control their appropriation; resources in this context include wealth, political power, status, socio-economic infrastructure etc. The other factor is prejudice associated with ethnic, religious cultural, gender and racial differences (2002:5).

It is not the task of this paper to enumerate or analyse ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria, however, the fact remains that they have drastic and damaging consequences on the generality of Nigerians and Nigeria as a nation. Orhungur has however observed that:

Unfortunately, there is hardly any peace in our society today despite its acclaimed religiosity. Conflict is a problem that is common among developed and developing nations. Local and international conflicts are a threat to peaceful co-existence, interaction, stability and development. It charges people with threats, fears, tensions anxieties and uncertainties. Characterised by use of force to injure or harm, destruction and bloodshed. Violence is intended to hurt the targeted person or group, physically, mentally and emotionally (2008:4).

Consequences of Ethno-Religious Crisis

The cumulative effect of the crises that have enveloped Nigeria in the recent past both at the ethnic and religious levels created a large hole in the development of our body polity and gave the impression that both identities and tendencies have nothing useful to offer the progress and development of Nigeria. This has tremendously affected our democratic values and norms and has consistently presented Nigeria as one big disunited and largely polarised to the extent that outsiders are beginning to see us as a conglomeration of nations with no definite goals, vision and aspirations. The nation has actually been projected as being anti-democracy.

Commenting on the specific impact on education Oyesikan has observed that “the attacks in some parts of the country have affected education adversely. In some of the attacks, school children have been killed. Specifically, some months ago, a group of terrorists went into Bayero University Kano and killed students. This inhuman action has brought schooling to a halt in some parts of the country. Children of primary and secondary schools have distorted academic calendar which is making them to be behind their counterparts in other parts of Nigeria (2013:180).

Let us now look at some of the impacts and their effect on education.

- **Loss of Life:** In almost every crises, there is loss of life. School children are always among those that loss their lives during crises. They are the most affected group either directly or indirectly, as observed by Abdu “they are affected as defenceless children ... many of these children killed during the crises were either trapped at school, neighbourhood or their respective houses”

(Abdu, 2002:137). As seen above, it is not only primary and secondary school pupils and students that are affected but even students in tertiary institutions of learning. If the pupils and students are not affected directly, they lose their parents or guardians thereby forcing “some of these children to abandon schools and other training programmes”. Without parents or guardians, children cannot continue school without sponsorship.

Closely related to the death of the students are teachers. In a report by Aljazeera titled “The legacy of Boko Haram Attacks on Education” on April 12 2018, the report stated that Boko Haram has targeted schools, killing students and teachers alike. The report continues that “in the past nine years, more than 2000 teachers have been killed and more than 5000 classes destroyed. In a school in BunU Yadi in Yobe State, thousands of students were burnt and killed in the school 4 years ago. Aljazeera noted that when the abducted Dapchi school girls were returned, parents were warned not to put their children in schools. Borno State alone has lost more than 5000 school children while more remain missing.

It is a known fact that abduction of the Chibok school girls in 2014 and the Dapchi school girls in 2018 are serious enough to scare teachers and students. This is because with the destruction and killings, it is very difficult to motivate teachers to stay while some parents, due to the fear of the unknown may decide to keep their children at home.

Apart from Borno and Yobe States, ethno-religious crises have disrupted school calendars also due to displacement of people. “As a result of the massive loss of lives and properties, many women and children were displaced. Many lost their entire properties as well as their parents and husbands. Our research indicates that out of the over 53,000 people displaced as a result of the crises about 75% of them are women and children. Many of the displaced children were naturally out of school. Some of them were staying long distance away from their schools, while others located to other towns and villages. Many were taken far away from their immediate communities, the children cannot go to school, while women cannot trade or get an alternative job. Out of the 30 children interviewed, virtually all of them indicated that they were out of school (Hussaini 2002:138) commenting on the impact of the sharia crises in Kaduna State between February 21st – 23rd 2000”.

Apart from displacement, schools, primary and secondary, even tertiary are first to be turned to refugee camps. So that even places that were not affected by the crises, schools can be used as temporary refugee camps thereby disrupting academic activities. And unless an alternative arrangement is made, schools remain closed as long as the refugees occupy the schools.

Another effect of displacement is that even those that are not affected may decide to relocate to safer areas, withdrawing their children from school irrespective of the period, it could be second or third terms or even during examination. The writer was an eyewitness during the Sharia crises in Zamfara State. Although, there was no crises in the state, the tension and fear caused many to relocate from Gusau,

thus withdrawing their children from FGGC Gusau, where the writer was teaching, this disrupts children's academic

Poverty is another impact that affects education. It is a fact that in war times, more men are killed than women as observed by Hussaini, "many women lost their husbands and were left with the additional responsibility of training the children and providing their basic needs. For those out of business, survival became a very serious problem (138).

On the impact of the Jukun-Tiv ethnic crises in Taraba State, Alubo observed that:

This perennial problem was grossly exacerbated by the crises as schools were hurriedly shut as everyone including teachers and pupils fled to safety. This is particularly true in Taraba State where the Tiv and non-Tiv fled for over a year. What is more, the schools were either used as military camps by the ethnic militia or become targets to be attacked and demolished. The Tiv people had more difficulties because unlike the other ethnic groups who were in locations where schools ran, there were no schools in the refugee camps, now that most refugees have returned, the communities are confronted with the challenges of rebuilding demolished schools (2008:203).

From practical experience, whenever there is tension both teachers and students or pupils will avoid schools or the schools are shut down, lest they get it trapped either in school, or on the way to school. And when there is tension, government may impose curfew for weeks, pending when calm returns, and schools remain close at these periods even during examinations.

Besides the obvious toll on human life, property is also destroyed in ethno-religious crises. This could be in the form of source of livelihood, such as businesses and residential areas, or people doing menial or casual jobs, or even well employed people may abandon their jobs and relocate to safety. This breeds serious poverty on the populace. So that, even when people manage to survive with their lives, there may be nothing to fall back on, as relations may not be in a position to provide for the needs of returning relations including the education of their children. In such circumstances, the issue of education is normally suspended. And those who are not displaced, threats, fears, tensions, anxieties and uncertainties and trauma will hinder people from moving freely to source for a means of livelihood, school fees inclusive even when schools reopen.

According to Alubo, the aftermath of the 2000/2004 crises turned the communities into a poverty trough.

The entire region relies on agriculture as the main economic activity. As it is true with agriculture in Nigeria, its labour intensive nature means that mass departures could only impede activities. Most of the eruptions occurred after the crops had been planted, but as the

farmers were forced to flee, there were no people to tend the farms... (2005).

In crises situations, it's not only the victims that suffer, but even the surrounding villages and towns are affected. Apart from the tension and apprehension, normal life activities are greatly affected.

For many weeks in some locations, and throughout in others, markets ceased to function. This was because outsiders were too scared to visit, and in any case, there was little to sell or buy – services such as milling and sale of grains and cooked food (a major sources of income for women) disappeared, finally, the usual thrift and savings schemes also collapsed... (2006).

The situation described above is not peculiar but is characteristic of almost all crises pruned areas. With the structures of development – human and material destroyed or threatened due to frequent insecurity and disruptions, it is very difficult for Nigeria to achieve its developmental goals and targets such as the Millennium Development Goals, Poverty reduction etc. And more importantly, sustain its educational goals such as the education for all 2020, the National Policy on Educational goals. The NEEDS policy thrust and education goals and key strategies among others.

In conclusion, peace and security are sine qua non for national development, and source education is the cornerstone of the development, the security of life and property and development are interlinked and interdependent.

Recommendations

- Good governance must be accorded high priority in Nigeria. A proactive government that takes prompt action whenever there is security report will generate high and considerable affection and support for the government.
- The National Security of Nigeria needs to recognise the lapses that arise in crises situations so that such can be well taken care of.
- Nothing gives parents peace and rest of mind than the fact that their children are safe in school. This will reduce the rate at which children are withdrawn from school. Therefore, the learning environment should be adequately sourced.
- The traditional and religious institutions can help reduce crises in the society by promoting dialogue, harmony and peaceful coexistence.
- Nigerian unity must be designed in such a way that it can accommodate Nigeria's pluralistic nature to make for a peaceful coexistence.

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