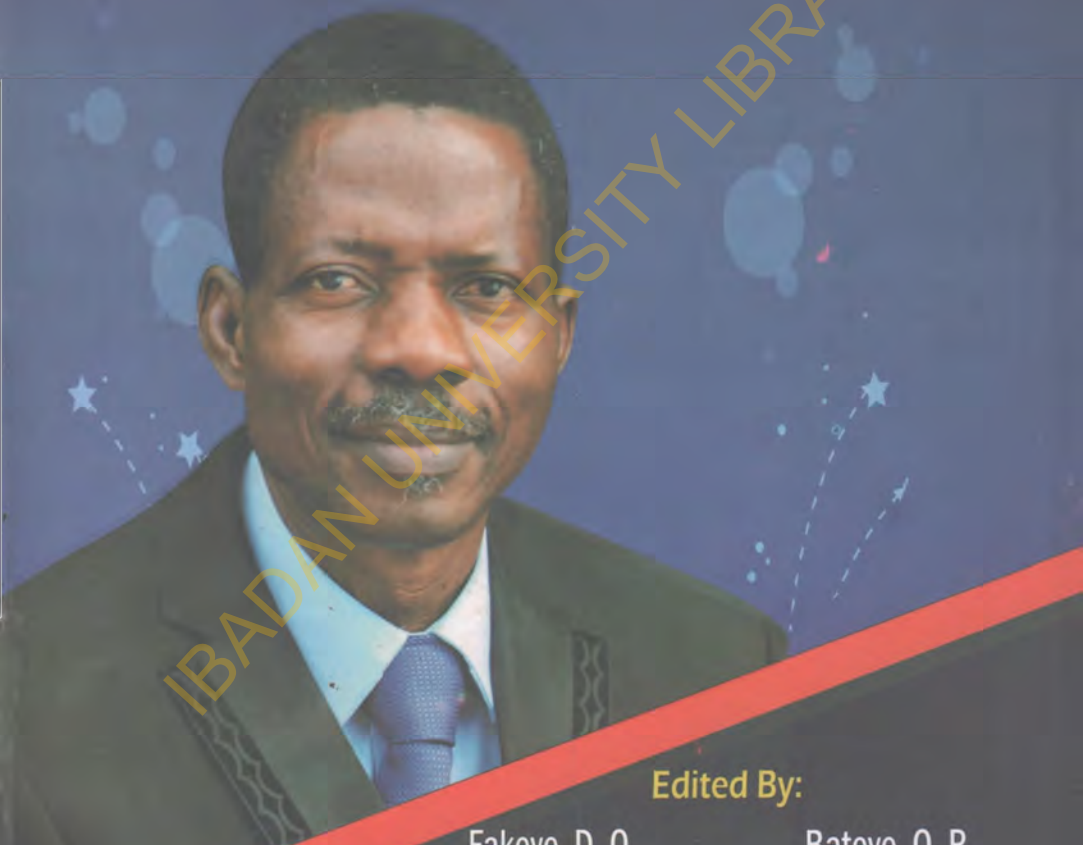
FURTHER THOUGHTS ON LANGUAGE, EDUCATION AND THE CURRICULUM NEXUS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

A Festschrift in Honour of

Professor Clement Olusegun Olaniran Kolawole



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THE ASTUTE ROLE OF RELIGION AS A TOOL FOR SUSTAINABLE N.. TIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Daramola, C.O.
Amosun, P.A, Ph.D

Introduction

Every society has its own basic sets of beliefs, attitudes and values that govern human conducts within it. The beliefs, attitudes and values form the primary basis of human interaction and socialization. They are usually referred to generally in a given society as norms and values which mark the border between the conducts that are acceptable and the ones that are prohibited. The sources of these norms and values are multifarious and vary from one society to another.

However, in most societies, some agents of socialization like the family, school, religion and peer group constitute the major sources through which the norms and values are learnt. It can be said that without socialization, the existence of human beings in a society as regards social order, legal order, economic and political order would have been anarchical. People would still be operating in Hobbesian society where life is brutish, nasty, short and mostly a state of fear and insecurity.

The problems threatening the human society arise from poor socialisation. In Nigeria, the problems of poor socialisation manifests in corruption on the part of our leaders, cultism in all facets including educational system, gross examinations malpractices, social promiscuity among youths, ethnicity, religious intolerance and host of others. Having realised the religious intolerance and host of others. Having realised the enormity of these problems and the potentialities of religion in ensuring sustainable national development in Nigeria through Social Studies Education, this paper will examine

- Meaning of Religion

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- Religion as a basis for socialisation
- The Concept of Sustainable Development
- Religious Role for Sustainable Development
- Implication for Social Studies Education.

Meaning of religion

Religion, as defined by Edward Burnett Tylor in 1871 cited by Chong (2015), is the belief in spiritual beings. By sacred things he meant things "set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, mosque and shrine". Religion is a fundamental set of beliefs and practices generally agreed upon by a group of people. The set of beliefs concerns the cause, nature and involve devotional and ritual observances. The beliefs also often contain a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs.

Dictionary.com defined religion as a set of beliefs, concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe, especially when considered as the creation of a super-human agency or agencies, usually involving devotional and ritual observances, and often containing a moral code garbing the conduct of human affairs. Arinze, as cited in Osibodu (2011), defines religion as "the consciousness of one's dependence on the transcendent being and the tendency to worship him". In view of this, religion is a universal phenomenon which makes its impact felt positively or negatively. While some people believe and adhere to the tenets of a religion, some are fanatical in their belief that they even kill and maim, believing that by so doing, their admission to paradise is guaranteed. (Perhaps, this makes it difficult to believe that all religions are violence-free, reference to Boko Haram sect in Nigeria). Considering the above definitions, the writers define religion as something which one believes in and strictly follows devotedly to a point or as a matter of ethics or conscience.

According to Ayantayo (2009), the church is a "social cum moral community" which takes a lead in fostering good environment devoid of pollution. Proving further, Anwuliorah (2011) posits that Christian ethics reject lifestyles that "disregard and degenerate God's

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creation and reject activities that perpetuate poverty and all those things that threaten the rights of future generations to healthy environment". In a similar vein, Abedi Saevestani and Shaioani (2008) contend that in Islam, the relationship between God and Human is described "more precisely by understanding that everything is encompassed by God and that human behaviour toward the environment is measured on the degree of compliance to God's command". This is the approach of Islam to all issues. The Traditional Religion equally sees God as the owner of the earth and that human beings have to obey the divine commands. Based on the above, it is perhaps, appropriate to state that religious values are socializing values and through them, the basic tenets of honesty, kindness, brotherliness, benevolence, sympathy, humility and love which are universal human values could easily be inculcated in youths.

Religion as a basis for socialization

Religion reaches the deepest roots of human socialization. In touching the human spirit, it has awakened in whole populations the capacity to love, forgive, create, dare boldly, overcome prejudice, discipline our impulsive instincts and to make sacrifices for the common good. Indeed, one could say that the seminal force behind socialisation of humanity has been the influence of religion.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the passage to culminating stage in the millennia-long process of the organization of the planet as one home for the entire human family cannot be accomplished in a spiritual vacuum. Religion has been a basis for all socialisation and progress in the history of mankind. It is the source of meaning and hope for the vast majority of the planet's inhabitant, and it has a limitless power to inspire sacrifice, change and long-term commitment in its followers. It is, therefore, inconceivable that a peaceful and prosperous society (a society which nourishes a spectacular diversity of culture like Nigeria) cannot be established and sustained without directly and substantially involving great religions in its design and support.

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All religions promise a future in which the peace and prosperity of humankind which form the primary basis of socialization will be established. However, this cannot be realized without effort. Such a lofty horizon requires continuous and perseverant labour, generation after generation, and it is religion that touches the core of humans and motivates them to better selves and society. Religion sends each person on a life-long educational journey, helping to banish ignorance and prejudice. Apart from this, the scriptures of all religions have always taught that the development of our inner lives is intimately linked to pure and godly deeds, and that we must see service to others, not only as a moral duty, but an avenue for our own approach to God. Religion in this view, educates individuals in their efforts to contribute selflessly to the society.

Socialisation by religion can be supported by human body model propounded by Chong in 2015, which emphasises that billions of cells with extraordinary diversity of form and functions collaborate to make human existence possible. Every cell has a reciprocal part of play in maintaining a healthy body. The cells, organized in tissues and organs, allow for the realization of distinctive human capacities, all these sum up to be the soul.

Similarly, human socialisation can be seen as the outcome of a set of cooperative and reciprocal interactions among the different components of society. As the viability of every cell and every organ matters to the health of the body as a whole, the peace and prosperity of every individual, every family and every group in the nation is necessary for the well-being of the entire human race which embraces socialisation.

Much as religion holds a lot of promises for human beings, its socialising values are often abused by some people who hide under it to spread violence. This nation has experienced much religious crisis. Notable violence include the followings; Maitatsine Riot in Kano (1980), Maitatsine riot in BullumKutu, Bornu State (1982) Jimeta-Maitatsine riot (1984), Gombe riot (1985), Kafanchan (1987), thousands of people lost their lives and property worth millions of naira was destroyed. Between 2008 and now, several ethno-

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religious crises have erupted that wreaked havoc on the nation's economy which seriously affects the national development of the country. The latest is the crisis of Boko Haram onslaught which started during the campaigns for 2011 General election in Borno State. The root of the Boko Haram crisis can be traced to Dutsen Tenshin in Bauchi State in 2009 which has now spread to major cities in the northern part of the country. Such cities are Kano, Kaduna, Yobe, Borno states and even Abuja the federal capital. Book Haram 'syndrome has been the most pervasive and persistent religious (so to say) crisis in this country.

Regardless of all the above crises, among the bases of socialisation which religion creates within the people in Nigeria are: -

- Promotion of healthy co-existence among adherents and other people in the society: It is clear that religion still enables people to come together as one.
- Enforcement of morals in the society for positive adjustment and socialisation: Every religion, (Christianity, Islam and even traditional) still preaches morals which give room for provision of a platform for identity formation and subsequent social identification, thus assisting in personality formation and orientation in Nigeria.
- Enhancement of psychological satisfaction of the mind through the belief that in crisis periods when all hopes seems lost, God will still intervene and bring about settlement. This creates an avenue to communicate with the divine and other people in the society.
- Promotion of unity among the people of the same religion: If harnessed, this is capable of providing a platform for interaction with adherents of other religions. This serves as a basis for socialization. For example, Christians do go to church to worship on Sunday, while Muslim go to mosque to worship on Friday.

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- Regulation of the behavior and conduct of every individual: Enduring values of honesty, kindness, love, sympathy, and humility are universal human attributes. In the same vein, vices like theft, dishonesty, robbery, adultery and murder are reduced to some extent if not totally eradicated.

Based on the above submissions, it could be said that religion impels people to transcend the limitations of self-interest and requires them to make efforts to contribute to their collective development and advancement. Equally, it helps them truly to appreciate their inter-connectedness and inter-dependence. It further enlightens them on how we relate to one another. All these form the bases of socialisation in Nigeria. They are among the virtues which religion as a source of knowledge, inspiration and guidance, preaches.

The Concept of Sustainable Development

The concept of sustainable development can be interpreted in many different ways. But at its core is an approach to development that seeks to balance different, and often competing, needs against an awareness of the environment, social and economic limitations we face as a society. All often, development is driven by one particular need, without fully considering the wider future impacts. The longer a nation fails to pursue sustainable development, the more frequent and severe its consequences are likely to become.

The focus of sustainable development in a nation is far broader than just her environment. It is about ensuring a strong, healthy and just nation. That is, meeting the diverse needs of all people in existing and future generations, promoting personal wellbeing, social cohesion and inclusion, and creating equal opportunity for all the citizens. Also, sustainable development provides an opportunity to make better decisions on the issues that affect everybody and every part of the nation economy.

Based on the above, sustainable development in Nigeria can be described as an improvement in lifestyles and interactions that will preserve physical, social, economic, political and technological environments for the needs of the present generation and the future

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ones. Supporting this position, Mohammed (2002) opines that sustainable development involves the following:

- Expanding the range of economic and social choices to individuals and nations by freeing them from servitude and dependence.
- Increasing the availability and widening the distribution of basic life sustenance, such as food, shelter and protection
- Raising the level of living in addition to higher income, provision of jobs, better education and greater attention to cultural and humanitarian values.

With these assertion, the pre-requisites for sustainable development thus involves improved nutritional standards, qualitative health care and educational services to the majority, improved standard of living in terms of decent accommodation, life expectancy which is influenced by the standard of living, availability and quality of health services, literacy level and income of the people (Mohammed 2002, Okunola2011). All of the afore-listed can only be attainable in a free and peaceful atmosphere devoid of religious crisis.

Religious Role for Sustainable Development

The common characteristics that are predominant in the two prevalent religions (although traditional religion cannot be totally rulled out) in this country are, honesty, kindness, love, sympathy, diligence, patriotism and enlightment (Fadeiye, 2005 and Anyacho, 2011). The following are common and can provide a platform for peaceful co-existence, resolution of the existing conflicts at communal and national levels and promotion of culture of neighbourliness and brotherhood – pointers to sustainable national development.

The following are the social roles which religions play towards ensuring sustainable development in a country like Nigeria:

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- **Define sin in a new concept:** The concept of sin should be expanded to include ecological injustice and human selfishness to others and his environment.
- **Teach the members the danger of excessive materialism:** Excessive materialism leads to some other depraved behaviours such as receiving bribes, misappropriation of public funds, theft, armed robbery and general covetousness
- **Inculcate in members the rites of reinvigorating the land through reforestation and aforestation ritual:** Notable religious rituals such as naming and baptism could be used as a planting exercise.
- **Divine concept of power:** A key religious role is the belief that all powers are from God (Allah) and that man is exercising the attribute of the divine when put in position of authority. All religions emphasise that leaders will one day be accountable for their deeds or misdeeds.
- **Role of chastity and controlled sexual behaviour:** The spate of HIV/AIDS scourge in the Nigerian society has been reported severally to be as a result of adultery and fornication. If inculcated in the national agenda, the role chastity and virginity emphasised by religion will forbid premarital sex.
- **Role of love and understanding:** Love for others as one loves oneself is one of the Ten Commandments in the Bible. Islam emphasizes love and care for other human beings and even animals.
- **Accountability:** Religion preaches accountability for human deeds. Whatever action or inaction of man, one day, he will account for it before the Supreme Being. Thus, the leaders and the led, the rich and the poor, the powerful and the weak would one day account for their deeds. The ideas of heaven and hell are based on this principle. While the just shall go to heaven, the wicked shall languish in hell fire. If these are

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made parts of the socialisation process and leadership development in youth, the principle, perhaps, will be useful in shaping people's attitudes to life and excessive materialism.

- **Transparency in deeds and character:** This is another role of religion. It preaches that people should be honest in their public and private lives and avoid shady deals

All the above roles of religion, if properly harnessed, will bring about a sustainable national development in Nigeria. This is supported by Anyacha (2011) and Salawideen (2012).

Implication for Social Studies Education

Social studies is an integrated study of man and his environment which imbues the learner with the cognition, skills, values, attitudes, abilities and competences that will enable a citizen to be informed, rational, analytical, participatory and functional in his/her environments and beyond. It is pertinent to state from the above submission that the aim, goals and objectives of Social Studies is the acquisition of skills, competences and abilities that will make a man positively adjust to the society.

Religion is a discipline which deals with the relationship of man with God. It has a lot to offer in the teaching and learning of Social Studies, especially with regards to citizenship education, inculcation of enduring political culture, human rights education, democratic education and leadership development. All these are the key areas of Social Studies Education.

The overall aim of Social Studies is the training of patriotic socially responsible and good citizens by understanding the social environment in which they operate (Azide, 2007). Among the role of Social Studies Education is to inculcate norms, social values in both primary and secondary schools, appreciation of diversity of Nigeria, positive attitude to citizenship, entrepreneurship and positive thinking, cooperation and honesty.

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Religions contribute to the understanding of Social Studies Education in the area of socialization, citizenship education and leadership development. In addition, the complexity of Nigeria social environment can only be explained by religious and ethnic pluralities. More than any other factors, religion and ethnicity have determined social interactions, human understanding, political participation, economic relationships, voting patterns and leadership choice since Nigeria's independence in 1960.

The major task of Social Studies Education is to make a child understand his/her society, religious interactions and values, gender roles, duties and obligations of citizens. In doing this, Social Studies Education provides a basis for proper understanding of unity in diversity. The emphasis is on how to make use of religious values for the training of the youths for sustainable development with the overall aim of ensuring peaceful relationship and eschewing ethno-religious crises that are currently threatening democracy in Nigeria. The teaching activities of Social Studies should make use of experiences that will emphasise and reinforce positive religious values for sustainable national development. Specifically, Social Studies teachers need to use teaching strategies that would be student-centered in order to ensure classroom participation and promote ventilation of feelings.

Conclusion

It appears that despite the potentialities of religions to contribute to the shaping of societal morals through its edifying and universal values, they have been neglected because of incessant crises which have made religion less appealing to the people. The position of this paper is to affirm the fact religion has greater roles necessary for sustainable national development though Social Studies Education than it is being allowed.

Recommendations

- It is clear that the religious fanatics should renounce their stance and work whole-heartedly to accommodate tolerance

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within their own ranks, so that peace and prosperity which form the basis of national development can be achieved.

- The responsibility for the plight of humanity rests, in large part, with the religious leaders. They are the ones who must raise their voices to end the hatred, exclusivity, oppression of conscience, violations of human rights, denial of equality, glorification of materialism, violence and terrorism, which are perpetrated in the name of religious truth.

Finally, followers of all religions must transform their own lives and take up the mantle of sacrifice for and service to the well-being of others. They can thus contribute to the realisation of sustainable development in this country.

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