PLANNED ACCULTURATION APPROACH IN CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: A VERITABLE TOOL FOR NATIONAL UNITY

IWUAGWU GODSON CHINEDUM
Department of Science Education University of Nigeria Nsukka
Email: chigods2013@gmail.com
Phone: +2347038878520

IWUAGWU FELICITAS ONYEMAZUWA
Department of Educational Foundations University of Abuja
Email: meetfelicitas@gmail.com
Phone: +2348034385716
&
AKUTA FELICIA ONYEKPAUWANAKA
Department of Educational Foundations University of Abuja
Email: ofigbokwe@gmail.com
Phone: +2348034385718

Abstract

This paper elucidates the need for a planned acculturation at childhood level of education for proper integration of different cultures in the childhood curriculum of Nigerian schools. The paper identified Nigeria as a multi-tribal, multicultural and multi-lingual nation where cultural and religious diversities of citizens threaten the unity and peaceful coexistence of the people. The paper therefore argued that planned acculturation at childhood level of education will increase inter-cultural assimilation, cultural tolerance and national unity since at this stage of education, withdrawal, resistance and restriction to acculturation is minimal while adjustment is maximized. Hence, the paper concluded that planned acculturation is necessary for national unity. Therefore suggested that Federal Ministry of Education in conjunction with the curriculum experts should develop and introduce planned acculturation as core subject at childhood education level in Nigeria; and that capacity building programme should be organized for teachers at childhood education level for effective and unbiased teaching of acculturation.

Keywords: Acculturation, Approach, Childhood Education, Veritable Tool, National Uni

Introduction

Nigeria is a multi-tribal and cultural country. The tribes speak different languages, dressings, foods, norms, values, occupations, and so on. Diversities and peculiarities among these tribes and cultures pose unique challenges in the country and educational system. Such challenges include tribal biasness; religious and cultural intolerance that have threatened the peaceful coexistence and unity of Nigerian. It is notable that Nigeria is made of many tribes.This makes the country very unique especially in its educational system. This is because all children have a meeting place which is the school where they are educated. Therefore, for education to be effective there is a need for proper coexistence among learners and teachers.

Education is believed to be the life wire of every country. This is because it is the 'house' where values, norms, and skills that will help individuals or citizens to cope with life's challenges are imparted. Education equips one with the abilities, competencies, technique and skills that are necessary for life. This is only possible if the aims and objectives of education meet the needs of the learners at every given level, which is dependent on the type of educational curriculum adopted in the country. Educational systems in Nigeria have different levels like the childhood which is pre-primary and primary, secondary level and higher institutions. Among these levels of education, national unity, harmony and peaceful coexistence are emphasized. This may not be unconnected with the possible threats exacted by multiplicity of tribes and cultural peculiarities. In view of the possible threats as a result of peculiarities among tribes, cultural and religious differences, the philosophy on education in Nigeria according to National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014), include: (a) live in unity and harmony as one indivisible, indissoluble democratic and sovereign nation founded on the principles of freedom, equality and justice; (b) promote inter-African solidarity and world peace through understanding. The philosophy on education therefore indicated that education is a veritable tool for national unity and harmonious coexistence of Nigerian citizen.

However, observation from realities has sown that Nigeria education till date is yet to achieved her dreamed unity and harmonious one indivisible, indissoluble democratic and sovereign nation founded on the principles of freedom, equality and justice as stated in national policy on education (FRN); as hate, tribalism, religious, cultural intolerance and insecurity is the order of the day. This indicates a lacuna in the Nigerian education.

Education is believed to be the life wire of every country. This is because it is the place where required change in the society is loaded. Education equips one with the abilities, competencies, technique and skills that are necessary for life. This is only possible if the right peg is put on the right hole in terms of curriculum and level of education best for learning experience that will lead to the desire change and attitude. Educational systems in Nigeria have different levels like the childhood which is pre-primary and primary, secondary level and higher institutions level and their curriculum planned likewise to achieve some stipulated objectives or goal.

For instance, childhood level of education in Nigeria is the earliest stage of education with its curriculum fashioned to provide the totality of a learner's experiences that prepares the child to learn how to learn. It is specifically referred to as a planned sequence of instruction or a view of the learner's experiences in terms of the teacher's or schools instructional goals. Curriculum comprises of the subjects taught to the learners, learner's activities and counselling given to them. This is aimed towards a desirable outcome. Besides, as foundational stage of education it deal and likely the best stage to lay the foundation national unity and harmonious coexistence through acculturation.

The Concept of Acculturation
The term "acculturation" is an English neologism (acculturation: cultivation, education, development) proposed for the first time in 1880 by American ethnologist John Powell, who treated it as cultural similarity arising from cultural contacts of different ethnic groups. Castro (2010) proposed to interpret the concept of *acculturation* as a process of adaptation to new

conditions of life with various stages of development, where "the shape of society is determined by its people rather than by their racial (hereditary) peculiarities, by human interaction rather than their wealth" (Klein 2005). The scientist focuses on the psychological aspects of acculturation. According to ethnologists, the initial cultural model of the recipient group changes as a result of the donor group influence. The recipient responds differently to social and cultural contact. It can fully adsorb the culture of the donor by abandoning its original cultural model (acceptance). It can partly change its culture, maintaining traditions and customs (adaptation) or completely reject the cultural model of the donor, keeping its original model unchanged (negative reaction).

Until the 1950s, the study of acculturation was mostly carried out by American anthropologists in connection with the investigation of changes among the North American aboriginals and African Americans cultures. The result of this research was a second "Memorandum on the study of acculturation", in which the definition of acculturation was updated and corrected. Acculturation referred to changes occurring during the contact of two or more autonomous cultural systems. Multilateral, bilateral and unilateral models of acculturation were developed. The claim was that direct contact is not necessary: the impact can be realized indirectly; the contact may not be continuous and not necessarily in-group. The transformation of the acculturation concept was caused by the spread of the psychoanalytic concept of culture. It led to the study of acculturation within a psychoanalytic approach as primarily individualistic trends in the development of culture. Acculturation was seen as a result of changes in values, role, behaviour, and personal social attitudes (Acculturation 1954).

Acculturation is a way individuals build in other people's behaviour into their life while still maintaining their own behaviour. According to Cole (2020), acculturation is a process through which a person or group from one culture comes to adopt the practices and values of another culture, while still retaining their own distinct culture. This process is most commonly discussed regarding a minority culture adopting elements of the majority culture, as is typically the case with immigrant groups that are culturally or ethnically distinct from the majority in the place to which they have immigrated.

Acculturation is a process of cultural contact and exchange through which a person or group comes to adopt certain values and practices of a culture that is not originally their own, to a greater or lesser extent. Cole (2020) added that, acculturation is a process which occurs as the result of first hand contact between autonomous groups leading to changes in the original cultures of either or both of the cultures. In essence, acculturation is a way to describe the adaptation process of diverse individuals to the dominant culture. The result is that the original culture of the person or group remains, but it is changed by this process. This process is most commonly discussed regarding a minority culture adopting elements of the majority culture, as is typically the case with immigrant groups that are culturally or ethnically distinct from the majority in the place to which they have migrated to. However, acculturation in this context is operationally defined as the conscious plan of activities that bring about good knowledge of other peoples' cultural, religion and languages with the aim of increasing inter cultural and religious tolerance.

Approach of Acculturation

Studies conducted on acculturation have focused on defining, conceptualizing, operationalizing and measuring acculturation. Early hypotheses of the process of cultural change suggested that individuals would fully integrate or assimilate into one culture, assuming the values, language and traditions of that culture. To assimilate, an individual or group not only assumes the cultural traits of a host society, but also is allowed to participate fully in social, economic, and political arenas. More specifically, assimilation is considered a theory of conformity of immigrant or ethnic minority groups to the dominant group (Suárez-Orozco, 2018). Assimilation occurs on two levels: behavioral or cultural assimilation and structural assimilation (Makarova &Birman 2016). Behavioral or cultural assimilation occurs when an individual or ethnic minority groups take on the values and life styles of the dominant group (Castro, 2010). The process of acquiring these cultural traits is acculturation. The second level, structural assimilation, is entrance of ethnic minority groups into the social groups, institutions, and organizations of the dominant group (Makarova &.Birman). For assimilation to occur, both levels must be present. However, history has shown that the Nigerian has maintained her cultural pluralism because individuals from diverse backgrounds have not been fully integrated into the majority culture at the educational, economic or political level. Hence there is urgent need for planned acculturation approach in Nigeria for unity, harmony and peaceful coexistence.

Planned Acculturation Approach

Planned acculturation approach refers to deliberate and conscious introduction of organized acculturation experiences to achieve a goal. It involves careful selection of cultural and religious experiences of different tribes for the purpose of making other tribes who are aliens to that culture to assimilate it while retaining their original culture (Makarova &. Birman, 2015). Planned acculturation simply means induced acculturation. It can take various forms, such as media, seminar, conference and a school subject. The authors opined that introduction of planned acculturation as a core subject at the childhood level (lower and upper basic education level) of education will ensure easy assimilation of various cultures in Nigeria hence they are young. Learners at the childhood level of education are highly adaptive to learn new things hence the rationale for planned acculturation approach for childhood education.

The Concept of Childhood

Childhood may be broad because of what constitutes a child. Childhood is said to be the stage or period of being a child that is the period before one's turns to puberty. Most times they are immature, dependent and have little or no experience. The stage of being a child differs from country to country in terms of age, legal, responsibility, physical attributes, culture, and what is childhood.

Age is one of the traits used to define who is a child. Some may say that a child is one who is below 20years of age or 21years of age. Some may even extend it to 23years of age. For example in Nigeria, a child can be said to be one who is below 18years of age. Legally in Nigeria, a person below 18 years is considered a child because such a person is deprived of certain rights. Such rights include right to vote and are voted for. This means that such a person cannot vote and be voted for. So anything that has to do with election, he/she should not participate. Again, such person is deprived of the right to drive. Any individual below 18

years is not allowed to drive. And by extension are not allowed to be married in the court. One below 18 year is considered minor and cannot marry in the court or judged in the court.

Another characteristics used to describe a child is that of responsibility that is the type of work given to children to do. Many a time we see or hear some individual's calling some parents wicked or causing them. Why? Because maybe another person's child leaving with them is made to do work that is above the child. As a parent, sometimes you observe that your child of three years would want to fetch water for you carrying a paint bucket and you refused, just because it is too big for the child. What we are saying is that there is a work expected of every child to do. Such works in most cases is culture/society determined. And such work should be given to the child. For example work for a pre-schooler include: learning to walk; learning to take solid food; learning to talk; learning to control the elimination of body wastes, learning sex differences and sexual modesty; forming simple concepts of social and physical reality; learning to relate emotionally to others in his environment; learning to distinguish right and wrong and develop a conscience and achieving physiological stability (Nzeribe 2002).

Besides, physical attributes distinguishes a child from an adult. These are the things you can see, such things are the signs of maturation like change in hair (white hairs), enlargement of the breasts, growing of pubic hairs and so on. As a person adds in age, maturation sets in, that is the unfolding of natural tendency. These physical changes are not influenced by a push. A child ordinarily is not seen with all these changes. That is why a child can be seen outside taking his/her bath, walking naked or even with pants without the public frowning at them. Once an adult is seen naked or walking with pants, the public sees him/her as going mental (madness).

Looking at the above definitions, what is childhood? Childhood in this study comprised of learners in Early Childhood/Pre-primary and Primary schools in Nigeria. Early Childhood/Pre-primary education according to National Policy on Education (2014), is education given in an educational institution to children prior to their entering the primary school. It includes the crèche, the nursery and the kindergarten. It is the education given to children from birth to 5years plus Primary education according to National Policy on Education refers to the education given in institutions for children aged 6 to 11 plus. Since the rest of the education system is built upon it, the primary level is the key to the success or failure of the whole system. Nzeribe (2002) refers childhood as the period of age 0-12 years in the life of an individual. She continued that the period may be divided into 2 or 3 stages: early childhood (0-3), middle childhood (4-7) and late childhood (8-12) or early childhood (0-6) and late childhood (6-12) (Igbokwe & Igbokwe, 2018).

This stage is best for planned acculturation since it gives room for the young minds to be tailored towards accepting other peoples' culture. At this stage, conflict, reaction and withdrawal   are at minimal. Conflict may occur as a result of a group or individual resisting the dominance of another group and is directly related to the level of adaptation created by the groups in contact (Berry, 2011). Conflict results when two opposing belief systems come together, leading to a struggle of power between two groups. As a result, the child and parents may experience acculturative stress (Salo, 2015). The acculturation stress often leads to adaptations that inhibit acculturation.

Adaptation may take three forms: adjustment, reaction and withdrawal. In adjustment, the cultural behaviors of the minority group become similar to those of the dominant group in order to reduce conflict (Berry, 2006). These changes could include language, values, customs, and self-identification with the dominant group. The child in school, pressured to conform, may then accept their way of life in order to reduce conflict and feel like a member of the classroom. In the form of reaction, the minority group may experience aggression and disagreement regarding the dominant group's views of culture. Reactions may include forming political groups or organizations to promote the minority group's culture. In the schools, children may resent changing their name and not respond when being called upon.

In withdrawal the ethnic group member withdraws from the dominant group. This occurs in such situations as segregation and the building of isolated communities from the dominant culture. The school-aged child may refuse to go to school. For the most part, however, children do not have the freedom in schools to act independently; conflict, adaptation, and withdrawal will be influenced by environmental and school demands.

The Challenges of Acculturation in Nigerian Cultural Diversity
Acculturation posed new opportunities like helping children in learning and appreciating of others cultures, values, norms, which would help in fostering unity among learners. More also, it helps learners to adapt successfully (psychological, physical health, life satisfaction and social cultural wellbeing) in the environment they found themselves. However, acculturation creates serious challenge to educational institutions, including the childhood programs that lay the foundation for children's school experience and achievement. Such stress during the acculturation can result in psychological problems like anxiety, depression, and feeling of uncertainty, aggression and delinquency.

Many of the children adapt successfully to school environments. In spite of unusually difficult circumstances, such as those frequently experienced by children, some even exceed the academic advantaged environments (Arends-Tóth, 2006). But may lack the desired acculturation that will ensure national unity and harmony in a cultural diversify nation.

Teachers' cultural and religious biasness, poses great challenge to planned acculturation. Teachers may be confronted with the dilemma of teaching a set of culture he or she does not accept, support or against his or her personal or religious belief. This often leads to withdrawal and restriction by the teacher. The children therefore may be allowed to be exposed only to those set of cultures accept by the class teachers. This may have been one of the reasons the introduction of creative and cultural art as a subject in school has not yielded the needed acculturation that can improve national unity and peaceful coexistence.

Also parents whose backgrounds may leave them poorly equipped to feel comfortable with their children's acculturation in school blames it on the teachers and feel that their culture is threatened by their wards assimilation of other cultural practices. Hence, poses a great challenge to acculturation in classroom in Nigeria as such parent will stop at nothing to dissimilate their children of the alienated culture using restriction of any form.

The above discussed challenges among others have rendered natural acculturation ineffective in Nigeria, considering the peculiarity of Nigeria nation as a multicultural with three major ethnic groups. Observation has shown that none of the cultures of this ethnicities has dominance over the other, hence what worked for other countries with a major and minority culture as in the case of immigrants and indigenes of a country where the immigrant subconsciously assimilate the culture of their host nation to be integrate into the society does not work in Nigeria. The authors therefore are of the view that planned acculturation should be adopted in Nigeria education at childhood level for national integration and peaceful coexistence.

Conclusion

Hence, efforts to address these issues are coinciding with growing pressures to ensure peaceful coexistence among tribes in Nigeria at time tribalism, cultural and religious intolerance is threatening the unity of the country. Therefore a conscious and drastic approach such as planned acculturation at childhood stage where stamping is at outmost possible; while withdrawal, resistance and restriction on acculturation is minimal should be adopted by the government and other stakeholders in education to ensure that children at their early stage should have good understanding of cultures, tradition and various religions in Nigeria which will go a long way to increase inter- cultural assimilation, religious tolerance and acceptance; and national integration which in turn will increase harmony among Nigerians for national unity.

Suggestions

In view of this study, the following suggestions were made to ensure effective acculturation:

1. Federal Ministry of Education in conjunction with the curriculum experts should develop and introduce planned acculturation as core subject at childhood education level in Nigeria.
2. Capacity building programme should be organize for teachers at childhood education level for effective and unbiased teaching of acculturation for national unity.
3. Parents should be sensitized through Parents Teachers Association on the need for planned acculturation of children in a multicultural and religious nation like Nigerian.

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