

## ASSESSING THE ROLE OF MULTICULTURALISM POLICIES IN MANAGING ETHNIC DIVERSITY IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

Multiculturalism has been viewed by authors in different situations and countries. Part of the effect of globalisation is the multiplicity of cultures and traditions across nations. Nigeria is known to play host to more than 500 ethnicities with diverse traditions and cultures. Multiculturalism aims towards equity; equal opportunity in the area of education, social and economic aspects of life for every ethnic groups. Language plays a major role in every society, language and society are conjoined twins that are not detachable. Understanding a language of another person/tribe automatically enables someone to identify with others who speak the same language and building confidence in such a person and his culture, it builds confidence which results in progress and development. For mutual intelligibility and existence, comprehension of ones neighbours' language is a must. Postcolonial and Multiculturalism Theory was adopted to view this topic with documentation methods. This paper investigates the situation of language and cultural diversities (multiculturalism) and multiculturalism in Nigeria as a concept. It views the multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-linguistic nature of Nigeria and the ways peace has been retained. It also proffers some plausible solutions on how to maximally explore multiculturalism to forestall the entanglement in Nigeria.

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## Introduction

Multiculturalism is a comprehensive term that refers generally to a set of related cultural movements and trends that emphasize the diversity of culture and society. It aims among other reasons to recognize, encourage, and affirm the participation of each ethnic group within a setting or a geographical boundary. Multiculturalism seeks the inclusion of the views and contributions of diverse members of society while maintaining respect for their differences and withholding the demand for their assimilation into the dominant culture. Multicultural societies are characterized by people of different races, ethnicities, and nationalities living together in the same community. In multicultural communities, people retain, pass down, celebrate, and share their unique cultural ways of life, languages, art, traditions, and behaviors. Multiculturalism is how a society deals with cultural diversity, both at the national and the community level. The main goal of multicultural education is predicated upon mutuality, respect, and acceptance for peace and stability.

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic nation with several ethnicities. This means that Nigeria is a nation with many different nationalities and cultures. Nigeria is a very ethnically diverse country with about 371 ethnic groups. The three major ethnic groups are, the Hausa, Yoruba, and the Igbo. The three major dominant tribes in Nigeria are Hausa, Yoruba, and the Igbo. These ethnic groups consist of multiple tribes up to 371. Each group has its language and customs and accepts one another. There are three main religions Christianity, Islam, and African traditional religions. In Nigeria, there are three kinds of multiculturalism; ethnic, linguistic, and national multilingualism. Despite this, the citizens live harmoniously among themselves.

Humanity has civilisations, cultures, languages, literatures, heritages and values which they guard jealously and uphold strongly. They hardly joke with any of this and can even go to any length with anybody or government that try to rubbish any of these cultural elements. Introduction of multiculturalism is a way to give credence to each cultures and civilisations. Multiculturalism then offers the needed perception and aptitude to understand and accept each other's cultures without imposing one's culture or condemning the others people's cultures. Roles being played by understanding of one's language and the language of another person cannot be underrated in any society for mutual coexistence.

## Postcolonial Theory and Multiculturalism Theory

This study, “Assessing the Role of Multiculturalism Policies in Managing Ethnic Diversity in Nigeria,” is grounded in Multiculturalism Theory and Postcolonial Theory. Multiculturalism Theory, as developed by scholars like Kymlicka and Taylor, emphasizes the recognition, accommodation, and equitable inclusion of diverse cultural groups within a society, providing a framework to evaluate Nigeria’s efforts in managing ethnic diversity. Postcolonial Theory situates these policies within the historical context of colonialism, highlighting how colonial legacies continue to shape ethnic relations, power dynamics, and social integration. Together, these theories offer a critical lens for assessing the effectiveness of multiculturalism policies in promoting national cohesion and social harmony.

### What is multiculturalism?

Multiculturalism refers to the state of a society or the world in which there exists numerous distinct ethnic and cultural groups seen to be politically relevant and the government of such a group promoting those cultures. Multiculturalism is a social perspective that is committed to publicly recognising and respecting many cultures and cultural identities. In the report submitted by the Library Services to Multicultural Population Sections led by Clara M. Chu, Multiculturalism is defined as the co-existence of diverse cultures, where culture include racial, religious, or cultural groups and is manifested in customary behaviours, cultural assumptions and values, patterns of thinking and communicative styles. The three most common types of multiculturalism are: ethnic, linguistic and national multilingualism. Summarily, multiculturalism is a society that is principally poised of assemblies of people with different ethnic, geographic, religious and cultural backgrounds which attempt for equal positions at political, social and economic stages of life.

### Importance of multiculturalism

As already mentioned multiculturalism entails a geographical enclosure with diverse cultures. There is a need for these people to interact within themselves, they need to respect their values and philosophies. Multiculturalism will provide opportunities to compare differences between societies and individuals. Thus, the different ones will respect and appreciate events at a healthier level of thought. At the same time, acting from different perspectives will be an opportunity to be protected

from conflicts. Multiculturalism therefore accommodates the mutual coexistence of different ethnic backgrounds. Looking at it from the sociological point of view, multiculturalism assumes that society as a whole benefits from increased diversity through the harmonious coexistence of different cultures. Multiculturalism preaches equity, in other word, multiculturalism is a situation where every member of each ethnic nationality is given equal opportunity and none is snubbed or considered insignificant. To achieve this great mission, there is the need for mutual comprehension of the language(s) in such a society. Mutual understanding of languages is akin to total comprehension of mode of living and its principles.

### Ways of promoting multiculturalism in society

Cultural diversity promotes peace and makes our society a more interesting place to live. Different cultures have their own beliefs and interests which they can share to offer alternative ways of doing things.

- ✓ Respect and celebrate the various ethnic, racial, cultural, gender, and other differences in your group.
- ✓ Make the time and create the space for this to occur. Cultivate a multicultural atmosphere.
- ✓ Incorporate language, art, music, rituals, and ways of working together that derive from diverse cultures.
- ✓ Learning each other language is one of the best ways to manage a multicultural team. One should consider different cultural communication and plan projects around different time zones.
- ✓ It will also be a good thing to be open to all cultures and their differences.

### Multiculturalism policy in Nigeria

Nigeria is a nation in the western part of Africa. The area began to come under British control in 1861 and was made a British colony in 1914. Nigeria gained independence in 1960 and became a republic in 1963. Ethnic strife soon led to military coups, and military groups ruled the country from 1966 to 1979 and from 1983 to 1999. Nigeria has been a full democratic dispensation since 1999. There have been elections and changes of government through democratic processes. Nigeria is regarded as the

giant of Africa because of its population and economy. Nigeria as of today is divided administratively into 36 states and the federal capital territory of Abuja. There are 774 local governments in Nigeria presently. Nigeria is home to 525 native languages. The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria was planned to accommodate these differences. Despite that, there are agitations from different ethnicities of marginalization which is one of the major reasons for protracted unrest in Nigeria. The present agitation by certain parts of the northern and southern parts of Nigeria was premised on such a claim which was a result of cultural dissimilarities. In Nigeria, a multicultural community, people retain, pass down, celebrate, and share their unique cultural ways of life, languages, art, traditions, and behaviors. In Nigeria, pluralist multiculturalism is thriving, despite some challenges that occur from time to time. Nigerians accept and tolerate other cultures to some extent regardless of whether there are conflicting values across cultures.

Music and dance are integral to Nigerian culture, and each ethnic group has its own specialties. Traditional instruments include various types of flutes, trumpets, musical bows, xylophones, and wooden clappers, as well as many varieties of drums. With more than 300 ethnic groups, over 500 languages, and many distinct religious and regional differences. Nigeria is also one of the world's most culturally diverse countries.

### **What is the cultural configuration of Nigeria?**

In simplified terms, the country can be broken down between the predominantly Hausa-Fulani and Kunari, and Muslim, northern states, the predominantly Igbo, and Christian, south-eastern states, the predominantly Yoruba, and religiously mixed, central and south-western states, and the predominantly Ogoni and Ijaw. South-South states.

### **Agitations for equal representation and sharing of resources: the way forward**

In Nigeria recently, there has been reoccurring agitation by different ethnicities on marginalization. This is causing unrest and loss of lives and properties. There is a need for proper monitoring of the planned ways of sustaining peace amidst different cultural beliefs. This is necessary and requires all necessary attention it deserves not only because of the population of Nigeria but because of the multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and multi-cultural nature of the nation. The national policy on languages

within the National policy on Education in Nigeria covers the multi-ethnic and multilingual goals that should be properly monitored and strictly adhered to pave ways for equal representation and distribution of resources.

The multilingual policy was enshrined in the National Policy on Education in 1985, which states that;

*In addition to appreciating the importance of language in the educational process, and as a means of preserving the peoples' culture, the government considers it to be in the interest of national unity that each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages other than his mother tongue. In this connection, the government considers the three major languages as Hausa, Ibo, and Yoruba. NPE 1985:9*

The mother tongue and or other language of the immediate community are to be used as the language of initial literacy at the pre/primary and primary levels as well as in adult/non-formal education.

The three major indigenous languages are to be used as the languages of national culture and integration. English, as the official language, is the language of formal literacy, bureaucracy, secondary and higher education, the law courts, and international communication.

Selected extra-exclusive languages, especially French and Arabic, are the languages of international communication and discourse. This is well spelled out in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the National Policy on Education.

The idea of inserting such a brilliant idea in the constitution and the National policy on education has made Nigerians over the years learn to embrace people from different parts of the world. The ability to relate, communicate, accept, socialize, and embrace other cultures around the world has made Nigeria an investment destination in Africa. Investors from different parts of the world can trade easily in Nigeria and can relate interpersonally without any form of bias, racism, or cultural shocks. This is part of the reason why the country is the first to be reckoned with in sports, culture, entertainment, and investment in Africa.

Language and culture are intertwined and remain inseparable. Understanding of a language is a must to understand culture and vice versa. Language is central to social interactions in every society. Language shapes social interactions and social interactions shapes language. The methods of learning another language aside the mother tongue as enshrined in Nigeria National Policy of Education, is a welcome

development towards mutual understanding and interactions. Language is the primary tool for communication purposes, for establishing peace and order in our society, for showing authority and power, and for attaining goals and objective. Understanding others' languages and cultures makes us to adapt to different cultural contexts by purposely changing our communication and general world view.

Language adapts and evolves over time, reflecting the changes and developments within a society. Likewise, cultural shifts and innovations are often reflected in the language spoken by its members. Language serves as a mirror of culture, reflecting its values, social structures, and even power dynamics. Language is one of the most important parts of any culture. It is the way by which people communicate with one another, build relationships, and create a sense of community. Language is an aspect of culture, it is how society preserves and spreads their culture. According to Halliday, the three main functions of language are the ideational function, which represents thoughts and ideas; the interpersonal function, which facilitates communication and social interactions; and the textual function, which organises and creates coherence within language. The primary uses of language are informative, expressive, and directive in nature. Language is used to reason, to express ideas, argue a point, provide directions, and much more.

There are roughly 525 native languages in Nigeria, and each is unique in a number of ways. Language incorporates social values. However, social values are only the same as linguistic values when the society is a stable and unchanging one. Social changes produce changes in language. Language shapes identity by influencing how individuals view the world, their cultural practices, and their sense of belonging to a particular community. Language shapes identity by reflecting personal, professional, gender, cultural, and national identities through choices in language use. Language shapes identity by serving as a symbol of pride, expressing cultural treasures, and influencing the challenges faced in learning a foreign language. Language shapes identity by influencing how individuals portray themselves in different social settings.

Language can function as a marker of individual or political identity, revealing individuals' relations with their audience and their self-ascribed political identity. Ethnicity, gender, geographic location, religion, language, and so much more are those factors on which cultural identity is heavily dependent.

To summarize importance of language,

- ✓ Language provides the human society with writing or other means of communication,
- ✓ Complete social interaction,
- ✓ Proper ideals of the society,
- ✓ Major elements of culture are acquired, developed and transmitted by means of language,
- ✓ Language is a vector for social and cultural learning.

The language that we speak influences our cultural identities and our social realities. We internalize norms and rules that help us function in our own culture but that can lead to misunderstanding when used in other cultural contexts. We can adapt to different cultural contexts by purposely changing our communication. Understanding each other's language has a great role to play for mutual coexistence and peaceful cohabitation of any society. Language and society remain intertwined and cannot be separated. They all live for each other. one cannot do without the other. Society controls the use of language. Every member of each society understands the rules governing the use of the language of such a society and will not do anything contrary to the laid down rules and regulations of the language.

Understanding of language makes people to understand the culture. Culture includes many societal aspects: language, customs, values, norms, mores, rules, tools, technologies, products, organizations, and institutions. Understanding culture makes people to define themselves, conform to society's shared values, and contribute to society.

## Conclusion

This paper has explained multiculturalism in a general sense as a concept, the aims of multiculturalism and the likely benefits derivable from it. It views multicultural, multi ethnic and multi linguistic nature of Nigeria and the ways peace has been retained. To forestall intermittent crises in some parts of the country the paper proffers some plausible solutions to maximally explore multiculturalism to prevent such imbroglio in Nigeria. The approaches embarked by the Nigerian



government, contributions, transformative and social action approaches have been yielding encouraging fruits which reduces the rate of multi-ethnic violence in the country. The social action allows the students and educators to play the major roles in managing cultures. Multicultural societies like Nigeria wants integration and not assimilation of other cultures. Each ethnic is allowed to preserve and practice his/her cultural heritage. Integration of cultures could be the best approach for mutual coexistence of Nigerians.

### **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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