



Review

Liberal education curriculum for the sustenance of unity in a pluralistic society

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This paper focused on liberal Education curriculum as a means of sustaining unity in a pluralistic society. The concept of liberal Education, pluralistic society and that of curriculum were discussed. The benefits of liberal Education were highlighted with emphasis on its contributions to sustain unity in a pluralistic society. Liberal Education as a global issue that had its way in the early 15th to 19th century were brought to limelight by the current advanced democracies of the Europe and the West. There is a call by this paper for the contemporary 21st century curriculum planners in the developing countries to adopt liberal education to be able to produce a complete functional free man in his effort to maintain unity within a framework of a pluralistic society. Suggestions were made on the relevant classroom delivery strategies with appropriate curriculum content for liberal education. This paper further recommended strongly the inclusion of liberal education in the 21st century school curriculum.

Key words: Curriculum liberal education, , pluralistic society

INTRODUCTION

Education in its general sense is a form of learning in which the knowledge, skills and habits of a group of people are transferred from one generation to the next through teaching, training or research. Etymologically the word “education” is derived from the Latin “educatio” meaning “a breeding, a bringing up, a rearing” Education frequently takes place under the evidence of others but may also be autodidactic. Autodidacticism is a contemplative, absorbing process of learning on one’s self or as a self-teacher linked with self-directed learning. Imogie (2011) posits that education is a basic force for the socio-economic and political transformation of society. In this regard education has been described as something more than schooling. Imogie (2011) further says that an educated man understands his world well enough to deal with it effectively.

A right to education has been recognized by some government. At the global level Article 13 of the United Nation 1966 International covenant on economic, social and cultural rights recognizes the right of everyone to an

education. In contemporary 21st century, although education is compulsory in most places up to a certain age, attendance often is not and minority of parents choose home schooling, e-learning or similar for their children.

Conceptual Framework

Liberal education: The word liberal is derived from the Latin word ‘liber’ meaning free. Liberal education as perceived by Zeng (2001) is a system or course of education suitable for the cultivation of a free human being. It is based on the liberalism of the Age of Enlightenment. Zeng (2001) further explains that liberal education has been described as a philosophy of education that empowers individuals with broad knowledge and transferable skills, and a stronger sense of values, ethics and civic engagement.

Definition of Liberal Education may be broad, generalized and sometimes even contradictory. Axelrod,

Anisef and Lin (2001) suggest that conceptions of liberal education are rooted in the teaching, method of Ancient Greece where there was division between slaves and freemen. The freemen mostly concerned about their rights and obligations as citizens and received non-specialized non-vocational that produced well-rounded citizens aware of their place in the society. Axelrod, Anisef and Lin (2001) posit that a sound mind in a sound body produces a free man capable of thinking for himself and of being a responsible citizen. All these potentials are rooted in liberal education.

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (2011) describe liberal education as usually global and pluralistic in scope, it can include a general, education curriculum which provides broad exposure to multiple disciplines and learning strategies in addition to in-depth study in an atleast one academic area. In pursuant of this ideology, the American Association for the Advancement of Science (1990:11) describes a liberal education in this way; "ideally a liberal education produces persons who are open minded and free from provincialism, dogma, pre-conception and ideology, conscious of their opinions and judgment and become aware of their place in the social and natural worlds. The means that liberally educated people are trained to think for themselves rather than conform to higher authorities.

While liberal education is western movement, it has been influential in other regions as well. For example in Japan during the general liberalism of the Taisha period there was a liberal education that saw the establishment of a member of school based on liberal education in the 1920.

Xin Chen (2004) comments that in 2000 Peking University started to offer a liberal education to its undergraduate students followed by other institutions. From the above presentation, it could be deduced that liberal education has become a global issue. However it is yet to find its feat in Nigeria and many countries of the third world.

Curriculum: An idea curriculum stems from the Latin word 'currus' meaning race course; thus referring to the course of deed and experiences through which children of row to become mature adults. Osam in Nnamani (2015) perceives curriculum as the set of courses and their content offered at a school or university. Curriculum is prescriptive and it is based on a more syllabus which merely specifies what topics must be understood and at what level to achieve a particular grade or standard. Thus curriculum has become recognised as the organized learning carried out in schools through individual or group subjects. The curricula activities are expected to promote behavioural changes in the learner which is contributory to the development of the society he belongs.

Pluralistic Society

Pluralistic society is that society that lives or practice the philosophy of pluralism according to Collins English dictionary (Patrick Hanks, 1980) is the theory of society

as several autonomous but interdependent groups having equal power. The existence in a society of groups having distinctive ethnic, origin, cultural forms, religion and others.

Pluralism is a social system based on mutual respect for each others culture among various groups that make up a society where in subordinate groups do not have to forsake their lifestyle and traditions but rather can express their culture and participate in the larger society free of prejudice.

Akudolu (2009) views pluralistic society as that society that contains a diverse group of religious cultural and tradition. Pluralistic societies exists around the world including, Nigeria and United States. Akudolu (2009) further posits that pluralism typically contains form components which at the simplest level are diversity, tolerance, commitment and communication which when put into play will help to sustain unity in a pluralistic society.

Pluralistic society contains many different religious groups. Getting people in these religious groups to imbibe the spirit of religious tolerance upon which relationship and interaction would be built on. Pluralism in another dimension requires members of a society to tolerate and understand those with different beliefs which involves education about the various religious and cultural groups. Similarly a pluralistic society needs a high degree of tolerance among members of the society to keep the peace and unity and reduce the preconceived notions and stem types.

In an aspect of communication, pluralistic society requires open communication with members participating as both listeners and speakers.

Unity: Bar-Tel in Akudolu (2009) views co-existence (unity) as a state of mind shared by members of a society, presents non-violence, recognition and respect for the existence of other group unity is to live together in peace within the members of a society more importantly in a pluralistic society. Though individual differences exist in all aspect of human endeavours but through peace and unity these differences are harmonized for the progress of the individual and the society.

Similarly, unity is a condition in which people from different cultural background live together and in harmony despite difference in goals of life, creed, ethnicity and cultural values. For people to accept these differences there is need to embrace, adopt and put in use liberal education curriculum for the sustenance of unity in a pluralistic society.

DISCUSSION

Merits of Liberal Education: Liberal education cultivates what Nussbaum (2009) calls "active citizenship" through off-campus community services, internship and research. It is thus assumed that only persons

with spirit of active citizenship can contribute to sustain unity in a pluralistic society Shoenberg (2009) perceives liberal education as helping learners to de-emphasize learning for the mere aim of passing examinations to learning for the acquisition of programmatic approach in solving problems of real life situation beyond classroom borders

Akudolu (2009) posits that learners exposed to this pragmatic approach in solving problems of real life situation develop into self-discovery learners that lives satisfying lives as they undertake the responsibilities of citizenship in a pluralistic society. In view of the above statement, Scheinder (2009) notes that collaborative intercultural and community life education are the new civic frontiers for our twenty first century word of diversity, contentations

Geary (2009) in defense of liberal education highlighted the benefits of liberal Education curriculum as follows:-

Liberal education offers learners a wide range of knowledge that consists of varying topics and also detailed study in one specific field of interest

- Liberal education assist learners develop social responsibility like the sustenance of unity in a pluralistic society.

- Liberal education helps the learners to develop strong practical and intellectual skills like problem-solving. Communication and analytical skills.

- Liberal education enables the learner to understand the world better through detailed knowledge of various philosophies; events possibilities and procedure that makes the wonders of life seem understandable and coherent.

Geary (2009) views means that strange and unexpected things will no longer be confusing or dazzling. For instance, the issue of sterotyprism and inferiority complex will be well understood as personal dispositions in things of temporal world.

Robert Harris (2013) on the purpose of a liberal education states that liberal education teaches students how to learn as it allows them to develop the required skill to become life-long learners, which will come in handy when absorbing new information and strategies needed to perform in careers with excellence.

Liberal Education will develop the intellectual and moral abilities of the learner rather than force-feeding him with many facts that are quickly forgotten or are accumulated in the memory like a foreign substance without any connection to his life.

Liberal education as a veritable tool to sustain unity:

National Policy on Education (2004:7) states that “education shall continue be highly rated in the national development plan because education is the most important instrument of change; any fundamental change in the intellectual and social out look of any society has to be preceded by an educational revolution. We cannot but continue to talk about education especially because No

Nation can develop to its fullest and keep pace with modern societal trends without an effective and efficient education system.

As veritable tool to sustain unity in a pluralistic society, liberal education allows students to see things wholistically. In view of the above statement, Alex Soholt (2013) posits that the opportunity to study outside of a specific major area of specialization will advance the students developing worldview. Soholt (2013) goes further to say that this idea is crucial to liberal education’s structure and purpose for the world economy and social responsibility are not divided and that all aspects in life affects how the world goes round. This implies that a broader view will allow the learner to live systematic life with a wide range of understanding of different contexts through which he would contribute positively to sustain unity in a pluralistic society.

Kiener (2013) joining the advocates for liberal education posits that liberal education enhances students wisdom and faith. He argues that gaining wisdom is any of the highest calling from God and that through the liberal education journey someone will learn to see who he is and what he needs to modify to become a better human being. In order to become better human being one must need and sustain peace and unity in the society he belongs especially in diverse cultural set up as in pluralistic society.

Harold Jansen & Shelly Mishmath (2011) contributing to the role of liberal educates in societal development say that liberal education helps students to become independent well rounded grounded and thoughtful individual’s who actively contribute to their communities not just through employment but also through interest and ability to participate in issues of their time including sustenance of unity in the society they belong.

Education has always been geared towards preparing the learner for effective life in the society. This view implies developing in the learner the ability to understand not only human behaviours but also different strategies to promote positive value like unity. Best in Nnamani (2015) asserts that the culture of peace and unity is built from values, attitudes, behaviours and ways of life based on non-violence, respect for life liberty, justice, solidarity, tolerance and human rights. All these variables put into use will help to sustain unity in a pluralistic society. In effect, education is expected to develop the learners potentialities and ability to sustain unity in such a pluralistic society as that of Nigeria.

Curriculum Implication of Liberal Education

All behaviour is conditioned on interest and every activity is done in order to reach a goal that is important to the person at that moment. In order to teach a child, one has therefore to arouse in him cognitive needs (interest). An important point to note about liberal education curriculum and unity sustenance is that unity cannot be imposed from

outside. Rather it is a process that has internal origin and emanates from the beliefs and actions of the people themselves and develops quietly and differently from the history and tradition of the people. For an instance, the unity in United States is based on the tradition of freedom, and that of Nigeria is based on the tradition of interdependence and unification of several ethnic groups. A good teacher has to be a professional with specialized skills, knowledge and training in pedagogical or general education teaching subject, curriculum and administration. Such teacher should also possess the ability to be creative and innovative. This implies that liberal education curriculum requires professional teacher to implement it in our schools. Feberesima (2014) says that change is inevitable in a society but the ability to prepare for the change through policies and programmes and to sustain such policies matter a lot in any developed and developing society. This implies that to implement any change in the society requires such policies to have a legal backing. For instance in Nigeria, the changes in educational system is backed up by the National Policy on Education. One of its provision says that the national educational goals is the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for survival of the individual and the online society (NPE, 2004:8).

UNESCO (2001:28) declares "learning to live together, learning to live with one another" the bedrock of education for the 21st century. Therefore liberal education curriculum should develop in the learners the psychological repertoire that supports peace and unity in the midst of conflicting ideologies. Further more liberal education curriculum is expected to equip the learners with the wisdom to recognize peace as option to violence and unity as option to disunity.

The curriculum constant for liberal education is based on knowledge and skills that can be applied as solution to problems in the real world setting. In this regard Dawson C. (2009) presents a veritable guide to the content of liberal education curriculum. These are"-

- Knowledge of human culture, physical and socio-economic environment
- Cognitive and psychomotor skills
- Civic rights privilege and responsibilities
- Collaborative life-long education

Dawson (2009) goes further to state that the curriculum objective of liberal education could be achieved through study in the sciences, mathematics, social sciences, humanities, languages and arts where as the cognitive and psychomotor skills are practiced across the various subject matter. The personal and social responsibility is learnt through active involvement in community life education and real world challenges.

Conner (2009) describes the early liberal education curriculum as emphasizing on equipping the individual with the skill of speaking correctly, persuasively and cogently whereas Akudolu (2009) rather suggests that the content of liberal education in 21st century constitutes

skills in leadership, citizenship and self realization which are veritable tools for the sustenance of unity in a pluralistic society. Learners who acquire and develop this capacity as contained in liberal education contributes in different ways to promote unity in the pluralistic society and above all such learners accommodate other people's way of life which is one of the basic requirement for peace and unity in a pluralistic society.

RECOMMENDATION

One of the primary purposes of liberal education is to develop in man the ability to think and reason. It is imperatively hoped that the implementation of liberal education curriculum in our schools will help to close the gap in the knowledge, skills, attitude of people towards the sustenance of peace and unity in a pluralistic society. Liberal education is the appropriate form of education required by learners in a pluralistic society so as to develop the spirit of unity and mutual coexistence and inseparable interdependence typical of a social value in pluralistic society.

Liberal education curriculum should be learner centered where the teacher has to put the learner in the focus of his pedagogical activities. Furthermore an active school is needed where classroom could be a kind of laboratory for the fact that the child must be equipped with knowledge, skills and attitude to live in a social framework where he will exhibit all that he has acquired in educational laboratory (school).

In implementing liberal education curriculum, caution should be taken to make the quality of learning to be enthusiastic rather than scholarship where learning becomes externally motivated for fear of punishment and failure or hope of reward than internally motivated out of genuine interest. Learners are judged from the stand point of their own world view and they have to be related to as human beings, respected and cared for. This paper anchors its recommendation that liberal education curriculum should be integrated into our school system at all levels of education.

CONCLUSION

Harris (2013) highlighting on the benefits of liberal education says that liberal education contributes to students happiness. Harris further explains that knowing more about life increases pleasure and that a cultivated mind enjoys itself and life and that knowledge makes one smarter and becomes happier. It all means that people who are highly education through liberal education have higher satisfaction of life as they take full advantage of benefits of liberal education. It could be deduced that persons who passed through liberal education enjoys life and can contribute positively to sustain peace and unity

in a pluralistic society. If the above assumption is acceptable then liberal education, curriculum for our schools becomes imperative.

Attempts has been made in this paper to establish the fact that liberal education curriculum is what our contemporary society needs to ensure that her citizens achieved maximum development of their potentials for the effective participation in executing personal and social responsibilities. The implementation of the above recommendations of the basic curriculum objective of liberal education as presented in this paper will help the learners to develop the skills of functional collaborative lifestyle for the sustenance of unity by establishing the culture of peace and unity in a pluralistic society.

This paper concludes by recommending that liberal education be made a compulsory or a core aspect of courses students offer especially in teacher training institutions and that serving teachers should be given opportunity to study the concept, principles and practice of liberal education through seminars, workshop and short courses.

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