

Race, Ethnic Relations and the Development of Education in Rivers State, Nigeria

O. A. URIAH, P.O. OBI

Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Abstract. Race and ethnicity are ingredients of social composition that help to foster rapid transformation in some developed climes. However, the case is adverse in Nigeria where race and ethnic relations have become hydra-headed problems that has fuelled misunderstanding and distrust. It is worst experienced in the educational sector and has been the bane for its under-development. The issues of race, ethnic relation and educational development is very visible in certain educational policies like nomadic education, migrant fishermen schools, approval of private universities, federal character, quota system, rotation/ zoning etc. A descriptive approach was adopted for this study while data was gathered from secondary sources like text books, journal materials and other records. The findings conclude that race and ethnic relations have done more harm to Nigeria's educational development. The paper recommends that, Nigeria should embrace issues and elements that engender national cohesion and boost educational development and de-emphasizes ethnicity, quota system, rotation etc in our systems.

Keywords: Race, Ethnicity, Ethnic, Relations, Education and Development.

1. Introduction

Many countries of the world are simply parchment of ethnic groups and variant races.

The United States of America is termed the most culturally diverse society in the world, “society of immigrants” (Lewis, 1967). The original population of America, was the American indigenes with only one percent, yet the Europeans, Asians, Africans etc. now dominate the ever-rising population of America. In Africa, race and ethnic relations have not been harnessed to a beneficial position. Here, ethnic and racial struggles cause wars and one of the multiplier effects is on how it impedes educational development. Ethnicity has resulted to amongst other problems, wobbling democracy, high level of illiteracy, high moral decadence, high rate of unemployment, increasing rate of population growth etc. (Makinwa, 1981). As a result of suspicion, distrust and corruption among the multifarious ethnic groups in Nigeria, educational development like other sectors of the economy has taken a back seat. It seems to be making a retrogressive progress, that is, it does not assume the rapidity it should attain in its developmental strides.

Concepts and policies like quota system, educationally disadvantaged states, zoning, rotation etc have affected the admission of students to schools, leadership in schools, quality of graduates, overall development of the schools etc. while the nomadic education was introduced in the northern part of Nigeria, dominated by the pastoral Hausa / Fulani tribes; ethnicity, race and tribalism induced the Southern (Ijaws) ethnic groups to solicit for the

establishment of Migrant fishermen schools to replicate what has been done in the Northern Nigeria. The Willink's Commission of 1958 took ethnicity into consideration to appease the Southern Minority tribes. Thus, their recommendations for the establishment of Niger Delta Basin Development Authority (NDBDA) was ethnocentric in nature. Ethnicity is a key sociological concept that has been applied in various ways and reared up its monstrous head through racism, nationalism, statism, indigeneship etc. It has therefore become cancerous that it cascades through the length and breadth of Rivers State, especially in educational development.

In this study therefore, we shall explore the influence of race and ethnic relations on educational development of Rivers state.

The specific objectives are:

- To examine the impact of race and ethnicity in educational development of Rivers state.
- To review the factors which exacerbate race and ethnicity in educational development of Rivers State.
- To outline the influence of race and ethnic relations on educational development of Rivers State.
- To proffer solutions to the problems of race and ethnicity in educational development of Rivers State.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1 Race and Ethnic Relations

Ethnicity is a derivative of Greek word "ethnikos" which means "a people or nation" and race means the descendants of a common ancestor especially those who inherited a common set of characteristics. Simply put, a race is a breed. Encarta (2009) refers to race as one of the groups into which the world's population can be divided on the basis of physical characteristics such as skin or hair colour. Race is usually employed descriptively. Abizadeh (2001) defines race as humans who share common ancestors from whom they have inherited some immense traits, such as

phenotype. On ethnicity, Banks (1996) views it as a collection of rather simplistic and obvious statements about boundaries, otherness, goals and achievements, being and identity, descent and classification that has been constructed as much by the anthropologist as by the subject.

Some scholars see ethnic relation as strife between ethnic groups in the course of which people stress their identity and exclusiveness. Yelvington (1991) says ethnicity is a social identity characterized by fictive kinship. Ethnicity is a term that half-heartedly aspires to describe phenomena that involve everybody, and that nevertheless has settled in the vocabulary as a marker of strangeness and unfamiliarity, (Mustapha, 2000). In all these definitions of race and ethnicity, it will be observed that they refer mainly to segmented human groups who engage in a particular type of social relationship. In addition, they view the employment or mobilization of ethnic identity and difference as a means to gain advantage in situations of competition, conflict or cooperation which is in alignment with the idea of ethnic relations.

Ethnic relations involve a type of social relations in which members of different ethnic groups seek advantage by appealing to their various groups, ethnic identities or shared groups' characteristics. There ethnic identities or characteristics include points of personal reference such as perceptions of common descent history, fate, and culture, which usually indicate, some mix of language, physical appearance, and the ritual regulation of life, especially religion (Webers, 1978, Hale 2004)

The concept of ethnicity dwells more on the corpus or relationship among people from different ethnic groups who decided to base their relationship on these differences (Osaghae 1994; Vaaseh, 2014). Ethnicity also denotes a contextual discrimination by members of one group against others on the basis of differentiated systems of socio-cultural symbols (Otit, 2000). Hence ethnic relations is the interactions among members of different ethnic groups. To distinguish the ethnic relations therefore, one has to dissect the four major attributes of ethnicity according to Nnoli (2001), into (1) polity, (2) exclusiveness (3) conflict and

(4) harnessing the benefits of inhabiting together.

2.2 Educational Development

Education is paramount to national development. Diverse researches support this assertion that it has transcended from being a theory to law, that it is a major catalyst for development (Ojiombo, 2009; Addo, 2010; Dienne, 2011). Nations of the world have hinged their developmental struggles on education, hence, they copiously invest in it, to explore the knowledge that assist in the diverse sectors of common endeavours like science, technology industrialization, self-sufficiency in food, standard of living and well-being, the environment, and others, hoping that the knowledge discovered, will bring about corresponding human advancement and societal development (Thomson, 2008, Dienne, 2011). Amaele (2011) says through education the society trains, forms and moulds the individual to achieve the social needs and aspirations. The humanists argue that the function of education is to develop the natural potentialities in the child to enable him function in the society according to his abilities, interest and needs. While the sociologist believed that education is to help the child imbibe the norms and values of the society to help for conformity and engender peace, progress and stability of society.

Education is what each generation gives to its younger ones which make them develop attitudes, abilities, skills and other behaviours which are the positive values to the society in which they live, (Fafunwa, 1974). At the initial stage, education in Nigeria had only taken the form of informality where people tutor their children (wards) about conducts, behaviours and discipline.

The environment and society generally also contributed immensely in shaping the child. It is mostly the societal influence that sticks permanently the badge of ethnicity on the child. Formal education was however introduced by the European Missionaries. This has served as their most cogent contributions to their long imperialism and occupation of Nigeria. The

colonial administration established both primary and secondary schools mainly through Christianity and their churches. At some point, conscious efforts were made to establish the University College Ibadan 1948 and the Yaba College of Technology 1932. Other tertiary institutions sprang up with time.

However, when some elements ethnocentrically realized that there was serious imbalance in educational development between the north and southern parts of Nigeria, some policies and concepts were introduced to initiate the negative consequences of this ethnic resolve. As a result of race and ethnicity in the educational development of Nigeria, came quota system, federal character principle, indigeneship, zoning, rotation among others. All these were introduced to help accommodate all ethnic nationalities and to arrest the negative consequences of poor ethnic relations in Nigeria. All these impede educational development in Nigeria. Rivers State is one out of the thirty six states of Nigeria and has diverse ethnic nationalities inhabiting the state. Has this race and ethnic relations also affected its educational development?

3. Theoretical Framework

It should be noted from the definitional approach that two critical issues were identified. The first is that ethnicity is neither natural nor accidental, but is the product of conscious effort by social actors. The second is that ethnicity is not only manifest in conflictive or competitive relations but also in the contexts of cooperation. This means that ethnic conflict manifests itself in various forms like politics, community services, violence etc, and even in education. In trying to proffer solutions to the question of race and ethnic relations to educational development, so many schools of thought have cropped up. Vashney (2002) distinguishes four schools in essentialism. This is to enable us identify different tendencies that are dumped under construction.

Essentialism restates the thesis of primordialism, that is, that ethnic identities are static and given. It notes that ethnic identities date back to the

distant past and are rooted in cultural differences among kinship-based groups.

Instrumentalism posits that ambitious classes manipulate dormant ethnic identities to pursue their interest, thereby politicizing ethnicity and ethnicizing the polity. Constrictiveness interrogates the origins of ethnic groups, tracing identities to the activities of colonial authorities, missionaries, and emergent nationalists and emphasizing the historicity and facility of ethnic identities.

Institutionalists emphasize the critical role of politics, constitutions and pragmatic policies in the framing of ethnic relations. Ake (2000) and Mustapha (2000) have correctly argued that these distinctions have been overemphasized as the use of one does not necessarily preclude the other.

3.1 Modernization Theory of Ethnicity

This theory assumes that conflicts in developing societies were borne out of the fact that the people who constructed these societies originated from varied cultures that engaged themselves in bloody duels before the advent of the 'civilizers'. This can be accommodated in the essential assumption of irrationality in ethnicity (Vaaseh, 2010). This characterization was based on the earlier work of many colonial anthropologists who were credited for inspiring earlier policies of ethnic and race relations in several African Societies like Nigeria. These include the promotion of separate settlement schemes for natives and "non-indigenes" in urban areas e.g Sabon Gari, (Kano), Gariki (Enugu), etc, indirect rule, and regionalism aimed at ensuring that there was a minimum social distance between the groups.

Modernization theory advanced charismatic national cohesion and integration like in America and Europe, has yielded distrusts and backwardness in Africa. Even with the modernization, there is persistence of ethnicity in Nigeria.

Nelson and Wolpe (1997) made a critique of modernization theory that inter-group conflict is seldom a product of simple cultural diversity,

and in the Nigerian case, there is little that is traditional about the contemporary pattern of political divisions. That is, rather than disintegrate ethnicity, modernization reinforces it, entrenches it, broadens it and roots it deeper in Nigeria to our overall disadvantage, the education is no exception. Coleman, (1986) shows how the desire of the Igbo-speaking people for education was threatening the status quo, where the Yoruba-speaking people who had earlier contacts with western civilization dominated the colonial service. Thus, both education and charismatic leadership, which modernization theory expected to reduce, exacerbated it. Apart from modernization theory, there are other theories on ethnicity like the Theory of State Dynamics developed by Geert, (1972), Collective Action Theory of Fredrik Barth (1978).

4. Educational Development in Nigeria: An Overview.

The introduction and development of education started earlier in Southern Nigeria because of the warm reception of the missionaries. According to Fafunwa (1974), the Southern protectorates had positive impact on the development of education because it provided protection to Christian evangelism, as a result, the colonial government extended its developmental dragnet and interest to the South-Eastern Nigeria, of which Rivers state then was part. By 1906, the southern protectorate and colony of Lagos has 40 schools as noted by Okorosaye-Orubite (1995). By 1842, the first primary school was established in Badagry by the Wesley Methodist Church. CMS Grammar School was the first secondary school, while Yaba College of Technology was the first higher institution in Nigeria, and was founded in 1932.

The establishment of schools in Nigeria kindled a spirit of competition amongst the various Christian missionaries (Okachikwu-Agbaraeke, 2014); Uriah and Okachikwu-Agbaraeke, (2017).

In Rivers State, the CMS, Roman Catholic Mission, Methodist Church, Baptist Church etc. founded many primary schools in furtherance of

their developmental effort in the secondary education sector, the Anglican Church (CMS) established the Archdeacon Crowder Memorial Girls' School, Elelenwo in 1943, Nyemoni Grammar School, Abonnema, OGS Okirka etc.

The Baptist Mission founded the Baptist High School, Borokiri Port Harcourt. And the Roman Catholic Mission established Holy Rosary Secondary School, Port Harcourt, Stella Maris College, Port Harcourt; Sancta Maria High School, Omoku; Ascension High School, Eleme, St. Scholastic Girls School, Bakana; St. Pius X College, Bodo; St Joseph's Secondary School, Umuaturu; Akpor Grammar School, Ozuoba; Mariam High School, Bane etc.

Government took the first bold step in establishing secondary schools with the opening of king's College, Lagos in 1909. From the first republic, more schools were established due to Nigeria's gaining of independence in 1960. Also, the second republic saw the creation of more states which consequently generated more schools (Njoku, 1996). The Federal Government in the 1970s established unity schools (Federal Government Colleges). Now, there are 104 of such schools owned and managed by the Federal Government (Njoku, 1996).

In Rivers State, the Post-Primary Schools' Board statistics, (2014) showed a total number of secondary school education of 238 public secondary schools. While the education sector has been liberalized, with a keener participation of the private sector. In the higher education sector, the Yaba Higher College came on board in 1932. The vehement criticism that characterized administration of the school led to the inauguration of the Asquith and the Elliot Commissions on Higher education in 1943. Their recommendations saw to the establishment of the University College, Ibadan in 1948. The UCI served as a campus of University of London. The Ashby commission was set up in 1959 to review the educational needs of Nigerian and to make projections into the next two decades. The report of this commission became a basis for the establishment of many first generation universities after independence like the UNN, OAU, University of Lagos, ABU

Zaria, University of Benin amongst others in the early 60s.

Furthermore, the military administration established many more in the 70s and when finally, education fell on the concurrent legislative list between 1979 – 1983, many states keyed in, to achieve the much needed technological development, with 18 universities established. In Rivers State, the University of Port Harcourt came on board in 1977 by the Federal Government of Nigeria, the state government had earlier established the College of Science and Technology, Port Harcourt. This was converted to the Rivers State University of Science and Technology in 1981. There was also the Advanced Teachers Training College (ATTC) Port Harcourt (1971), and College of Agriculture, Onne.

Presently, in Rivers State education has radically been transformed, that the state can boast of several universities, Polytechnics, Monotechnics and Colleges. For instance, University of Port Harcourt; Rivers State University; Ignatius Ajuru, University of Education, Ken Saro Wiwa Polytechnic, Elechi Amadi or Port Harcourt Polytechnic, College of Health Science and Technology, School of Nursing, Pamos University of Medical Sciences (Private), Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku; Federal Polytechnic of Oil and Gas, Bonny etc.

Education is a tool per excellence for national development. This upholds the fact that education is not only useful but cardinal in any society that prepares itself for growth and development. However, education depends to a large extent upon the particular culture and character of the people and society or what they aim to achieve. Nigeria had experimented many educational policies such as Universal Primary Education (UPE), the 6:3:3:4 system, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) etc. Most policies in Nigeria were simply adopted to sooth the ethnic groups or race of the nationalities that make up Nigeria. Rivers State being a microcosm of the country, (Nigeria) with diverse ethnic groups has favoured ethnic relations in the establishment of secondary schools during

the 2nd Republic, and also the sitting of the higher institutions. To foster foster educational development in Rivers State, consideration of the race and ethnic relations becomes a sine qua non in Education sector.

5. Influence of Race and Ethnic Relations on Educational Development in Rivers State.

The federal character principle is a policy introduced into the legal domain of Nigeria to assuage the fears, suspicious, misunderstanding and worries of some backward ethnic groups in Nigeria. It is thus introduced as an harbinger of peace and cohesion and to foster good relationship amongst the various ethnic groups that make up Nigeria. The reason behind the federal character principles is very plausible especially to engender unity in diversity. But the underlying politics that gave rise to it brings about mediocrity even in the educational sector. Federal character means representation of all the sectors, shades, classes, states, etc. of the federation, but in truth, it is the representation in all sectors by the diverse ethnic groups. For instance, the Nigeria Delta Development Commission (NDDC) Board must have a Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Ibo members to give it a national character and coloration instead of the oil-producing states of the South-South and South East.

The Federal character dictates how lecturers are employed, vice chancellors are appointed, catchment areas, community and state quota, educationally less developed states, conditions in admissions, unity schools etc. This rather that bond the peoples, enshrines divisive tendencies that have bedeviled the rapid development of education and affected its quality in Nigeria. In Rivers State for instance, it is becoming a custom that the Vice Chancellor / Rector / Provost of an institution and the Registrar cannot come from one ethnic group. It has reached the feverish peak where senior prefects in secondary schools must be an indigene (some-of-the-soil).

Quota system is another policy that has been adopted in Rivers like in Nigeria that pulls the strings of rapid educational underdevelopment.

Ethnic groups are assigned their own quota in admission, unity schools, establish over board. As a result of this, people in Rivers State feel that any institution located within the ethnic area is theirs for the asking. There is immediate community quota, local government quota in term of scholarship, appointments, promotions etc. Zoning is that, establishment of educational institution are zoned in different senatorial zones or ethnic groups for the development to be decongested. Thus there is the Federal College of Education Technical at Omoku, Federal College of Arts and Science, Ahoada, RIART Onne, Federal Polytechnic of Oil and Gas Bonny, University of Port Harcourt, Choba, IAUE Rumuolumeni Port Harcourt, Ken Saro Wiwa Polytechnic Bori etc. This zoning spreads the higher institutions all over Rives State However secondary schools are scattered all over the communities that make up the different ethnic groups for a greater friendly ethnic relation and cohesion

In some ways, race and ethnic relations had fostered a better rapid educational development in Rivers State. This can be observed from the perspective of competition amongst the diverse ethnic groups like the Ikwerres, Etches, Engennis, Ekpeyes, Abua, Odual, Ogba/Egbema/ Ndonis, Kalabaris, Igbanis, Wakirikes, Ndokis, Elemes, Ogoni, Andonis, Opobo etc. Such competitive nature of the ethnic groups can be visualized in schools built by the communities, ethnic cooperation (e.g Country Grammar School, Ikwerre-Etche), increasing number of enrolment in schools, orientation that education is the key to development etc. In Nigeria generally race and ethnic relation can be said to be 'badluck' to educational development because of the imbalance (North and South), the polarization which influences the polices (Almajiri schools and migrant Fishermen/Farmers schools), hijab wearing schools (North) and non-hijab wearing schools (Christians) etc. Race and ethnic relation affects the socio-economic fabrics of Nigeria, and waves destructive ornaments that the peoples are ready to acquire. The difference has prompted by negative ethnic relations as it affects the education sector. The ethnic nationalities can only be at war over land, politics, economies and

socio-cultural issues but such do not succinctly affect the educational development.

6. Empirical Review

Many authors and schools have conducted indebt researches in the areas of ethnicity, race and educational development. Though, there exists that knowledge gap or lacuna in the area of ethnic relations and educational development of Rivers state Nigeria. Abizadeh, (2001) reviewed that ethnicization of university education and national development; the Nigerian experience. Adopting a descriptive-analytical approach, explored the destructive effects of ethnicity and how it has bedeviled the education sector. They found out among other things, the deprivation of university education to qualified applicants, displacement of frustrated students and the eventual lose of those that could participate in total development. They summarized that merit is scarified at the altar of ethnicity.

Otiti (2000) worked on the ethnic question and the challenge of development in Nigeria: a study of Port Harcourt, Rivers State. He suggests however to promote meaningful dialogue among schools towards theological and policy consensus to meet the immediate challenges of enthroning peace, unity in diversity and development generally.

Ake (2000) took a critical look at the emergence of ethnicity in our polity, and took a swipe of colonialism that it crystallized and perpetuated ethnic cleavages by instituting divide and rule strategy as they decided the consequences of a united opposition to colonialism.

Mustapha, (2000) dwelt on the ethnic politics and social conflicts; Factors in Nigeria's under development. They agreed through the context analysis of literature that ethnicity has slowed down development and recommends that Nigeria should do all in his power to outgrow ethnic rancor and rivalry

7. Summary / Conclusion

Race and ethnicity are cancerous and monstrous issues that have bedeviled social economic development in Nigeria. In Rivers State, this has adversely affected the educational development. Thus, this ranges from government polices to the implementation. Quota system has watered down the quality of graduates from our schools due to ethnic relationship consideration. So also is rotation, zoning, community and ethnic allocation, as can be seen in admission, appointments of staff, leadership, location of schools etc. for instance, how will the migrant fishermen school function in Rives state? The Almajiri school in Ubima was established on ethnic consideration, yet is non-functional.

The Riverine areas of Rivers state are making a strong case that the higher institutions in the state, are located at Ikwerre land, they want one in Kalabari area, whether viable or not. Sometimes, in Rivers State we experience ethnic rivalries and dashes e.g Ogonis vs Okrika; Andoni vs. Ogoni, Abua vs. Oduval, Ogbakiri vs Kalabari etc within such period, schools located in such places are closed down. Educational activities are usually at a standstill point. This negatively affects the students and lives an everlasting effect in their psyche.

Ethnic relation has frustrated many intellectuals in the education sector that they joined the brain-drain for a better life and equitable promotion of their course. Some scholars who are qualified for promotion in their various schools are not granted, promotion due to ethnicity. Such does not augur well with the developmental strides expected in the state.

8. Recommendations

- The government and leadership of the state must ensure peaceful co-existence, harmonies living, good-neighbourliness, co-operation and ethnic cohesion among the multifarious ethnic nationalities of Rivers State.
- There should be the substance of peace, equity and justice to all irrespective of the ethnic nationality.
- The policies of quota system, community allocation, zoning, rotation

etc are adverse to the growth and development of education in Rivers States and should be jettisoned for merit to take its pride of place.

- In order to quell the effect of poor ethnic relation, the legal instruments should be strengthened to abolish indigeneship, ethnic nationalities etc in Rivers State. This in effect will curb the ethnic experience in recruitment, admission, promotion etc. of the staff and students in the education sector.
- Education should be geared towards the promotion of social / group relations, national cohesion, development of culture of productivity, development of values of good citizenship, rather than as weapon for division and disintegration of the state and Nigeria in general.
- Establishment of more higher institutions and other related study organizations should be spread beyond Ikwerre land to Ogoni, Andoni, Okrika and kalabari lands, to cover their interest.

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