

Enhancing National Cohesion through Cultural Diversity in African Education Context

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.803034S>

Received: 03 March 2024; Revised: 08 April 2024; Accepted: 11 April 2024; Published: 17 May 2024

ABSTRACT

Africans and the world at large share common values of humanity. Lessons learnt from the recent COVID 19 pandemic, electoral differences in Kenya ongoing war in Ukraine and natural disasters like drought show that people in the world share such problems as one person. Education has have been used to reach mankind before and after these experiences. The weight of social pandemics, economical and psychological feelings among Kenyans and other Africans call for national cohesion and healing. Cohesion has been misconstrued with democracy, cultural diversity and human rights in Kenya and other African countries. Along the same vein educational curriculum has been blamed and teachers held to task on failing to address cultural diversity and cohesion in schools. The practicability of such a curriculum still hangs on the socio-economic balances of many African counties. This paper attempts to address National Cohesion in the higher Education context using cultural diversity as a tool for strengthening school governance, community partnership. The paper also attempts to identify Challenges and workable solutions of enhancing national cohesion. The paper concludes by observing lessons learnt in social skills and national cohesion in different forums. The paper recommends in-depth studies on social skill education and pedagogy, Continuous training of African professionals on social change and improvement of education and community partnership campaigns on cohesion.

Key Words: Cohesion, culture, diversity, education

INTRODUCTION

Education has been used as a tool for making things in life workable at all time and moments. Peoples' culture is passed from one generation to the other through educations offered by parents at home and later into higher institution of learning. Chakraborty (2018) conclude that Education plays a very important role in molding the character of an individual. The role of education as an instrument or agent of social change and social development is widely accepted in the present society. Education can be used to change students and heal the society which is the sole aim of cohesion in Kenya. Culture can be permeated at any level in education. Soumya and Savarimuthu (2020) point that Culture is the social change of any character in society and it can be developed through education. Communities can only be brought together through sending children to school and under the guidance of the teacher people's culture is disseminated. These two scholars suggest that Education can promote, develop, preserve and transmit culture among others in a society. Cuela (2009) find that the European Union (EU), Latin America and the Caribbean use social cohesion as precedence for cooperation. In the same vein the author reiterate that differences on levels of income and accepting peoples' equal cultural rights must be prioritized when addressing cooperation. National cohesion is deeper than peace and compels persons of one nation to fight for a united front. National cohesion can be improved gradually through the education system of a country once the tenets of cohesion are factored in the curriculum. Nasimyu and Naituli (2018) concur that Kenyans are progressively

cognizant of the changes in social and economic status in society. On the other hand these authors point that Kenyans are uncertain about government readiness towards the implementation of policy initiatives and the constitution. National cohesion in this context deserve enhancement to eliminate dissatisfaction from the politically disadvantaged communities.

Growth and achievement of stability in a country is an important component that is highly linked to integration and cohesiveness at the National level. Ruto, Shiundu and Simiyu (2023) explain that curriculum changes should cover teacher education on culture and cohesion. This is one of the channels through which this goal can be attained. It is through the system of education where basic curriculum inculcating cohesion can be achieved (Ganira, Odundo, Gatumu and Muasya, 2018). Politically instigated violence can be coherently addressed through educating members of the community in different forums.

EDUCATION AND NATIONAL COHESION IN KENYA

The National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) enacted in 2009 in Kenya to address matters of cohesion and related issues. Its formation factored in ethnicity, religious affiliations, politicians, professionals, gender and people with special needs among others. The politically instigated violence in 2007 saw the need to put Kenyans together through several initiatives for instance through religious bodies, the national intelligence forces, the police talking to grieved youth, higher education institutions and international friends of Kenyan like the African Union and the world bank among others.

Comparing Kenya with Ruanda the element of fear still persist for instance Sabiti (2021) using facts from qualitative findings for instance “*we live and converse with them but do not share genocide stories*” observe that Kenyans have been sharing similar sentiments after every disputed post-election experience, Secondly “*we do not trust this people after every disputed political demonstration*” These sentiments form deep mental health issues that require national healing to parents and students who missed schooling, witnessed destruction of property and loss of life.

National cohesion approach should be a large scale program for Kenya as a country to embark on and requires proper planning. Substantial resources are required to meet the cost of educating all communities for instance against destruction of roads, churches and business among others during violence in Kenya. However these violent activities occur in volatile regions and conducted by people who are below poverty line incited by their elite groups Alshumaimeri, (2022) propose that educational change can be prioritized to make education better and improve the outcomes. The author also explains that change requires awareness of context and stakeholder must be clear of the dimensions of effecting the change. Politicians and other agitators of hate speeches can be very good examples of educating students and parents from the regions they represent on virtues of peace, cohesion and their outcomes.

Kenyans have differing religious beliefs; needs; demands and sexual orientations but the education system overrules all these. The school and other institutions of learning through policies and regulation have been used to accommodate all learners under one mother “education”. Oyibe (2015) observe that a connection exist between teachers’ expertise and student performance. However educational practices employed by teachers provide opportunities for the students to address cohesion issues through seminars and symposiums in colleges and public gatherings.

Learners are potential parents and whatever is taught becomes a narrative to their siblings later in life. In an event of violence, calamity, war and accident among many future generations learn from parents and such events are likely to recur. Okoro, Onodugo, Chukwudi, and Okeke (2018) explain that peaceful coexistence in society can be taught through social studies, history, civics education as well as religious studies. In Kenya and East Africa students read about rebellions and uprisings in history books. This literature shows how such events occurred and the aftermath which translate to similar and worse experiences during school

riots.

In Tanzania Maji maji rebellion was largely accelerated by the ambitions of local leaders, the opposition and expanded by indigenous coastal elites (Becker 2004). These practices are used by elite of today in institutions of higher education and politicians to cause chaos. National cohesion in Kenya is a good example with repeated events from year 2003 to 2023 National presidential elections. The voices of the elite have always been noticed targeting certain communities or the government of the day.

Cultural Diversity and Education in Africa

Education given through books and pictures of events are available to students and teachers as described in the curriculum. This information is similarly transmitted through e-books, magazines, videos and social media platforms. These gradually shape the attitude of individual students towards diverse cultures and change (Atrupane and Wikramanayake, 2011). These changes have enabled many Kenyans and other Africans to coexist in harmony.

Many African countries bequeath colonial experience of failed statesmanship which have divided Africans deeper than what could have united them (Nasimyu and Naituri, 2018). These culminate into a weak social cohesion exhibited by extensive unending rivalry even over issues amendable on a round-table resolution. Students who have witnessed cultural animosity and abandoned schooling live for many years of trauma. Healing from such wounds of hate deserves ultimate cohesion achieved through inter-school meetings and competitions. Schools-for-cohesion (2015) advise that the Ministry of education should review policies in the education sector to promote ethnic harmony especially during admission to secondary schools and institutions of higher learning. This ensures that a regional cultural mix is enhanced among students.

Teachers can be facilitated to organize forums and invite crusaders of cohesion as guest speakers during public ceremonies to give key note address on peace and cohesion that emulate Kenya's rich culture. In Kenya education curriculum Social studies lesson introduces students to different aspects of cohesion in the society and discuss virtues of living with oneness. Ruto, Shiudu and Simiyu (2023) concur that curriculum should be revised, teachers should be taught, and civic involvement should be promoted in order to increase the impact that social studies taught in Kenya and other developing countries. Modern technology under the auspices of artificial integration implementation in schools and colleges has opened the entire world to students. These have enabled many Kenyans students to access information on social cohesion, victims of violence, torture and degradation. In the same vein this has aggravated mistrust in some communities and promoted violence in schools, colleges and Universities. Garissa university students attack in 2019 is a case in point (Namwaya and Abdi, 2019) which saw 147 victims executed and forced the institution to be closed. This finally interfered with learning until healing ensued for the students, parents and the state in order to resume training.

Banditry, terrorism and extremism in Kenya from time to time have facilitated widespread campaign on social cohesion and national healing. Ogunniyi (2023) explain that the heart of education is to convey cultural heritage of a society to its younger generation. In the same vein authors point that embracing the rich cultural heritage of diversity in education is bridging societal gaps that enhance social cohesion. In many African countries education is working and social cohesion is widely taught however gaps in social cohesion have always been expanded by the native elites. This class of professionals is hard to re-educate on culture and cohesion. To provide long lasting solutions the elite must be converted to crusaders of peace and national healing in Kenya.

Governance and Cohesion in Higher Education Institutions in Kenya

Higher education institutions can be used by the government to empathize with the politicians, electorates,

writers and attention seekers from the country to embrace peace and dialogue in Kenya before and after political elections. Koamatsu (2012) citing Hopken (1997) argue that in the former Yugoslavia, textbooks were used to describe the use of violence as a legitimate means to solve problems. The author further explain that education takes place through use of books where rebellions, uprisings and redemptions have resulted to very strong impacts in the affected countries. This was a case in the former Yugoslavia where such events escalated violence whenever it occurred (Komatsu, 2012) and the government was torn apart.

Educationists and scholars have documented evidences of cohesion during and after post-election violence of 2007, cattle rustling in Rift valley, violence by the Sabaot land defense force in Mount Elgon and Waghala massacre in 1984 in Kenya where the government was blamed. The young school going age have witnessed these clashes and require deep healing in school and at home with their families. Georgette (2008) explains that “the prohibition on the use of torture, inhuman and degrading treatment is absolute, including during a state of emergency”. These atrocities and experiences of communities who were victims of brutality and torture in Kenya largely require mental healing from government and human right groups. Georgette in the qualitative findings says “*The people of Mt. Elgon are being doubly victimized, first by the rebel militia and now by the army*”. This case fails to explain cultural diversity with government on one side using the forces against one community, families are displaced and education adversely affected. The Kenyan human rights group (WKHRW) has conducted intensive campaigns against victims of atrocities in Kenya and respect for human rights in the country which have impacted negatively on education.

School management committee members are selected from the local community and become champions of cohesion to educate students, parents and the community before and after acts of violence especially in the vulnerable region. This can ensure continuity of educating students without interruptions and enhance competition of government resources by all students in Kenya. Many education institutions in Kenya operate under unique cultural orientation but the curriculum harmonizes all learners. For instance students says ‘*some subjects are hard to pass; we are giants in football; our school anthem*’ irrespective of cultural affiliation. This school culture enhances performance in and out of class. Students identify themselves according to their culture only when they get back home. Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA, 2010) report that “schools promote students well-being; equality and community cohesion and these are fundamental in building suppleness amongst children and young people” Students in Kenya interact within the school irrespective of cultural orientation.

In most African countries once a child goes to school parents and local leaders are no in touch with parents and age mates due to school assignments. Old parents lack access of passing inherent knowledge in form of narrative, stories and idioms especially to college and university students. This has denied this class in society time to de-school the school going age to home social life. However, teachers in schools form pillars as well as opinion shapers in the absence of the community but teaching methods and challenges normally encountered are of great concern (Taghreed and Fakhri, 2014). Through exploratory studies, teachers can facilitate and guide their students on conflict management. Conflict management fosters a harmony in society enhancing national cohesion and values of cultural diversity to take place through school governance initiatives.

Community Partnership and National Cohesion through Education

In England (UK) local authority creates a link between the community and schools purposely to offer opportunities on cultural and holiday activities for sharing experiences (TDA, 2010). This is a learning experience to county governments in Kenya and other African countries. There is need to borrow from the British and create tailored meetings in their individual countries. Members of a county government share a lot in common and this way decentralized leadership can be more effective. Drama and music festivals under ministry of education are also good avenues for expressing cohesion even if these are seasonal events.

Following the post-colonial experiences, many societies in Kenya were subjected to conflict along religion; national and/or ethnic lines. Education has been used to divert these elements of social disorders and cultivate cohesion within the society. Report from TDA (2010) observe significant weaknesses in existing models of education and advocate for more effectively balanced education system at the interests of diverse cultural groups towards the development of social harmony. Heafner (2013), argue that in a democratic society the students are ready and willing to participate in knowledge, skills, innovations and involvement by showing citizenship.

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Most African countries are still healing from colonialism and education is still necessary to address African problems and solutions. Wealth distribution is still imbalanced in Kenya where some communities still remain as marginalized and labeled as Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs)

1. National cohesion is seasonal and lessons learnt are easily forgotten across social cultural boundaries. In Kenya after every election the government in power promises to clear land ownership and banditry attacks however, it takes more than one year to deal with crises. For instance in 2023 after elections of 2022 violent cases erupted in many parts of the country followed by land disputes in Mount Elgon area. Many students ended up missing school and witnessed loss of lives, displacement and rape. Lynch (2011) confirm that in Mount Elgon exist “culturally distinct communities with discrete homelands” and this was used by politicians to fuel war crimes in Mount Elgon by Saboat land defense forces.
2. Most African leaders should come up with strong slogans like Americans and Europeans when it comes to one people one country. Mountbatten (2023) observes that each country in Africa has its own identity and he continues to say “I feel more proud in Zimbabwe because I live here and have done so for most of my life”. The analyst contributing on the topic “African Pride” comes out strongly to support his pride of Zimbabwe, “Zimbabwean Pride”. This topic can be used to enhance cohesion education in Kenya and other African countries.
3. Education system alone cannot succeed in the war on cultural diversity and national cohesion. All stakeholders must partner to win the battle on cultural diversity and national cohesion. Sessional Paper No. 9 of 2013 on National Cohesion and Integration in Kenya was meant to strengthen institutions on national cohesion and integration addressing socio-economic issues and access to quality public education among others (National irrigation Authority, 2023).
4. School governance has been skewed along policies and legislation of the mother country. Boards of management and committees are characterized by the parent and community involvement towards attainment of quality education.
5. People’s culture in Africa is a thorny issue and has not been eliminated through education. Cultural values can only be preserved and enriched by the individual communities to cultivate harmony. Kenya like other African countries have many ethnic communities with unique cultural norms, values and norms which leaders must protect and preserve.

CONCLUSION

In Kenya, social-cultural education offered has been important in facilitating individuals to get information as well as abilities to know and successfully navigate social change together with physical environments where they live

Social skill education has been used to build harmony between Kenya’s various ethnic groups by transferring knowledge to students in school and colleges. Social education has been identified to facilitate

more cohesive communities and stronger sense of nationalism. This has promoted peaceful coexistence among individuals of various ethnic groups.

Social cohesion has provided good environment for education to produce personalities with amicable solutions to disputes, dialogue, communication, logical thinking, enhanced background history of cultural heritage and national cohesion in all African countries

RECOMMENDATION

1. Institutions of higher learning should propose training programs on multicultural education and curriculum development.
2. Government of Kenya should provide resources for cultural diversity initiative promote inclusivity in education.
3. Ministry of education in Kenya should enhance community partnership in addressing National cohesion and healing in schools and colleges.
4. Community leaders, to provide initiatives that can foster intercultural dialogue and collaboration between schools and local communities

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