

A STUDY OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND CULTURAL HERITAGE AS COHESIVE FORCES AMONG SELECTED TRIBES IN NIGER STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study examined indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage as cohesive forces: a study of selected tribes in Niger State, Nigeria. Nigeria is a pluralistic nation with diverse ethnic and socio-cultural diversities. These diversities should be a source of strength and advantage to the nation, instead, there have been cases of crises and civil unrest due to these differences and lack of understanding between the people. The research design used was survey method and quantitative method was used to gather data from the respondents. The Scott Smith's formula for selecting a sample from an unknown population was used to select a total of 385 respondents from the Gbayi, Nupe and Kadara tribes. The findings of the study were: Indigenous knowledge is peculiar to a particular set of experiences and rooted in a particular culture based in a certain geographical location. In addition, indigenous knowledge is most commonly distributed among certain demographic variables such as: gender, age and occupation. Furthermore, indigenous knowledge plays a vital role in enhancing the welfare and overall quality of life of the Gbayi, Nupe and Kadara communities in Niger State, Nigeria. The study concluded that indigenous knowledge, coupled with cultural heritage if positively deployed, will strengthen the cords of unity, cohesion and oneness in Nigeria. The study recommended that Citizens should be

encouraged to teach the younger generation their mother tongue because languages play a vital role in bringing together a diversified society and that there should be constant traditional and cultural shows exhibiting the cultural artifacts and heritage of the people.

Keywords: Cohesive forces, Indigenous knowledge, Cultural heritage, Pluralistic society, Tribes, Niger State

Introduction

The tempo of mistrust, dissatisfaction, mutual suspicious, unhealthy rivalries among different socio-cultural groups in Nigeria is not only a thing of concern but is taking a dangerous dimension. Rather than using the different cultural diversities, religious beliefs, ethnic differences, large population as instruments for mutual growth and sustainable development, there have been rancours, suspicions, and internal rivalries (Amin, 2002). In which cases, there have been colossal losses in terms of human and material resources. According to Human Rights Watch (2020), cases of people who have become homeless due to internal wars and crises in Nigeria are too rampant. This has given rise to the presence of Internally Displaced People (IDP) Camps. Farmers cannot concentrate on their various farms to produce food that the populace (citizens) would eat. Baytiyeh (2018) noted rightly that societies that are pluralistic in nature like the Nigerian society are generally known to have weak national cohesion making the risk of political tension and violent conflicts considerably high.

Nigeria is a pluralistic nation. According to Onyima (2016), Nigeria is blessed with very rich cultural heritage and the citizens have been naturally endowed by God with indigenous knowledge which if used appropriately could help to accentuate cohesion, unity, growth and development of this nation. Part of the natural endowment of Nigeria appears in form of diversities, differences, similarities, affinities and common heritage. Under normal circumstances, these features are supposed to be used as avenues of strength rather than being used as agents of disintegration. It should be emphasized that Nigeria is the only country in Africa with a great population of well over 180 million people according to 2001 population census (NPC, 2001). There are different and well over 270 ethnic groups in Nigeria and over 400 languages are spoken in this country. The dominant groups and the languages that are well spoken by majority of Nigerians and which cut across different cultural and cross ethnic backgrounds are: Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo languages. There are some Nigerians who can speak the three (3) languages fluently.

In fact, it is now mandatory for children of school age to learn another native language apart from their mother tongue. A good number of cultural and ethnic activities exist among the different socio-cultural groups in Nigeria. For example, many Nigerians irrespective of tribal or cultural differences eat similar or same food like: yam, "tuwo", pounded yam, "garri (eba) and so many other delicacies. There are some words that have similar meaning among some ethnic groups in Nigeria. For example, the Yoruba call cock, "akuko", the Igbo call it "okuko". Stone is called "okuta" in Yoruba and it is called "okute" in Igbo language. Yam flour is called "elubo" in Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa call it "alubo". Hausa call blessing

"alubarika", Yoruba equally call it "alubarika". The word baba means father in Yoruba language. Apparently it is being used by many tribes in Nigeria now. Yoruba call "ada" cutlass while Igbira call it father. While Yoruba call "ota" enemies, igbira call it friend. The lists of such similarities are endless.

Furthermore, the country is bounded and divided naturally in the southern and northern parts by two major rivers, River Niger and Benue. The confluence of these two major rivers is in Lokoja, Kogi State. God has made it so beautiful, that the vegetation in the country is varied and diverse. The crops that are grown and the animals that are reared in different part of the country are diverse equally. Therefore, whatever is not available in one region could be purchased and consumed by other regions that do not have such products. Equally, God has done it in such a way that when the products of a particular zone are finishing the products of another zone in form of farm products would come out. This means that one region cannot do without the other. It must be added that the country is equally blessed with a lot of natural alluvial deposits like: crude oil, gold, manganese and so many other resources.

Despite their differences Nigerians have many things in common. This can be seen in the way they organise some ceremonies like: wedding, naming and burial. The country equally has common currency, Naira and Kobo. Nigeria has other national symbols which are seen as avenues of unity and strength. They include: national anthem, national flag, national pledge, coat of arm, Independence Day, and other national monuments. All these differences and diversities are supposed to be used as opportunities and avenues for growth, cohesion, and sustainable development rather than as an avenue for division and disintegration. Differently put, its diversity should be harnessed to make it stronger as there is strength in diversity. As such, a very strong bounding force is needed to keep these diversities in check and ensure that everyone in the community gets along with each other with little or no friction. Such bounding forces are known as cohesive forces.

Cohesive Forces in a Pluralistic Society

Literally, cohesive force is the act of molecules sticking together and being mutually attracted to each other. When it involves humans it is known as social cohesion. According to Newton (2004), social cohesion is the willingness of people in a given community to cooperate with each other in order to achieve common purpose which is mostly to survive and to prosper. Social cohesion could be described as the glue that binds people together. It is one which works towards the well-being of its members in order to fight exclusion and marginalisation, and propagate trust (Australian Human Rights Commission). Nigerian pluralistic nature needs a very high degree of social cohesion. However, attaining and maintaining the goal of cohesion could be a big challenge. Social cohesion is an important determinant of a peaceful, democratic and prosperous nation. It creates stronger bonds within and across different groups and fosters greater trust in the government institution. It is even more important where there is a history of current context of conflict, hostility or mistrust among the different groups or citizens in a country. According to United Nations (2019), a 'cohesive society' is one where all groups have a sense of belonging, participation, recognition and legitimacy by respecting diversity using ideas, opinions, skills,

etcetera.

Indigenous Knowledge and Cultural Heritage as a tool for Cohesion

Indigenous knowledge refers to knowledge systems that are unique to a given culture. The main characterising feature is that it is locally based, grounded in a particular culture and geographical location. Indigenous knowledge encompasses language, system classification, resource use, social interactions and spirituality. The relativeness of indigenous knowledge could not be over emphasised. It is not at the same degree for every member of the community. The older members of the community usually carry more knowledge than the younger members in a community. Ogundokun (2019) observed that indigenous knowledge is the technical 'know-how' gotten by a person from his or her community which includes: culture, traditional view of the world. This knowledge guarantees adequate peaceful human co-existence.

Cultural heritage includes evidence of human creativity and expression. It is a representation of history of a people: the past, present and the future. Cultural heritage goes beyond material objects that can be seen, and felt. It consists equally of oral history, knowledge and skills passed down from one generation to the next within a community. Some examples of cultural heritage that could enhance cohesion are: language, agriculture, art, music, dressing, among others, traditional beliefs, food items and preparation. Language: a major area of indigenous knowledge is the ability to learn, speak and use the native language. This comes in form of proverbs, chants, folklore/story-telling and music. For example, in African culture, proverbs could be used to promote good characters. According to Olajuni (2007) African culture do not encourage crime of any kind; as such African languages should be used as a medium of instruction at the basic school levels in order to imbibe such trainings in kids. This is an act that will advance indigenous knowledge.

Agriculture, as indigenous knowledge tool is a traditional vocation covering fishing, animal rearing, and crop production and so on. Different set of people have different forms of agriculture that are peculiar to them. Some parts of Nigeria are well known for the production of certain crops for example, the Gbayis are prominently known for yam farming, while the Nupes are well known for fishing among other trades. This scenario where a set of people produce what the other part does not have causes inter dependency on each other and this enhances social cohesion automatically.

Niger State is a prototype of the Nigeria society, the problems that are bedeviling Nigeria is also taking place in Niger State as well. Niger is one of states in Nigeria which has 23 local government areas and out of the 23, the Nupe tribe occupies 11 Local governments; while the Gbayi tribe occupies 11 local governments while the Kadara tribe occupies just 1 local government. The study, therefore investigated how indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage could be used as cohesive binding and cementing forces among selected tribes in Niger State.

Statement of the Problem

The pluralistic nature of Nigeria as a nation in terms of ethnic and socio-cultural diversities coupled with the large population are expected to be used as avenues of strength, growth, development and cohesion. Nigeria is endowed with very rich indigenous knowledge, cultural heritage, talented men and women. Rather than using all these factors to the advantage of the nation and pursuing the goal of a united, virile, strong and indivisible nation, there have been cases of terrible crises in all the regions as the nation. Crises due to ethnic differences are rampant. Cases of killing and destruction of human and material resources due to religious intolerance are common. Some people fight and kill in a bid to enforce their own idea or ideology on other groups. Youth unemployment and restiveness have added to the problems of the nation. Does it mean that Nigeria as a nation does not have indigenous knowledge and cultural artifacts which could be used as cohesive forces among the different cultural and ethnic groups in the nation? It is against the backdrop that the study investigated indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage as cohesive forces in selected tribes in Niger State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. To what extent could indigenous knowledge serve as a cohesive force among selected tribes in Niger State, Nigeria?
2. How would the positive use of indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage serve as bounding factors among selected tribes in Niger State, Nigeria?

Methodology

The research design used was survey research method. Quantitative method was used to gather data from an unknown number of populations. The instrument used was questionnaire tagged, 'Questionnaire for Indigenous Knowledge and Cultural Heritage as Cohesive Forces among Tribes (QIKCHFT)' which was used to elicit information from 385 respondents among the selected tribes in Niger State. The instrument underwent a reliability test using Cronbach Alpha which showed an overall correlation of 0.81, indicating that the instrument was reliable and could be adopted for this study. The population for this study is undetermined because the population is widely dispersed. Therefore, the sample size for users was gotten from a formula of getting a sample size from an unknown population as stated by Smith (2018) to be:

$$(Z\text{-score})^2 * \text{standard Deviation} * (1 - \text{standard Deviation}) / (\text{Margin of error})^2$$

$$(1.96)^2 * .5(.5) / (.05)^2$$

$$(3.8416 * .25) / .0025$$

$$384.16$$

$$= 385 \text{ respondents}$$

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Mean responses of Nupe, Gbayi and Kadara tribes on the extent indigenous knowledge serve as cohesive forces among them

S/NO	Item	X ₁	X ₂	X ₃	X _t	DECISION
	Language	4.50	4.30	4.20	4.30	VH
	Agriculture	2.31	2.05	2.18	2.18	L
	Arts and craft	3.45	3.00	3.23	3.23	H
	Dance	2.09	2.44	2.27	2.27	L
	Read/write language	1.90	1.77	1.84	1.84	VL
	Folktales	1.90	1.76	1.72	1.79	VL
	Proverbs	1.90	1.73	1.84	1.82	VL
	Dressing	2.85	2.62	2.50	2.66	L
	Food	3.45	3.42	3.30	3.39	H
	Music/chants	3.46	3.82	3.49	3.59	H
	History	2.09	2.45	2.27	2.27	L

Key: X₁, X₂, X₃ = Responses from Nupes, Gbayis and Kadara respondents; VH= Very high; H= High; VL= Very low; L= Low

Analysis on Table 1 revealed that language is considered a very high cohesive tool by the three tribes because a large number of them agreed highly that their native languages help them identify other people of same tribe or that can understand the tribe. This closely followed by music, food and dance which have a mean value of above 3.00 stating that these bring about togetherness and relaxation. Whereas, history and dressing have low mean basically because the peoples' history are not being adequately passed down and most people have taken on the western mode of dressing and wearing their traditional attires only on special occasions. The items with very low responses are problems, folktales, reading and writing, proving that these activities are hardly being done as digitizations and modernizations have replaced folktales, proverbs and the likes.

Table 2: Mean responses on the positive use of IK and cultural heritage as a bonding factors

S/No.	Items	X ₁	X ₂	X ₃	X _t	DECISION
1.	Unity	4.50	4.30	4.20	4.30	SA
2.	Togetherness	4.31	4.05	3.58	3.98	SA
3.	Reduced conflicts	3.45	3.00	3.23	3.23	SA
4.	Shared leadership	4.09	3.44	4.27	3.93	SA
5.	Shared opportunities	3.90	3.77	3.84	3.84	SA

Key: X₁, X₂, X₃ = Responses from Nupes, Gbayis and Kadara respondents; SA = Strongly agree

Table 3 shows that all the respondents strongly agree with a mean rating of above 2.50 to the fact that indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage are good bonding agents because they foster unity, enhance togetherness, reduce conflicts, shared leadership and opportunities among the tribes.

Discussion of the Findings

The data presented in Table 1 provided answers to the research question on the extent indigenous knowledge serve as cohesive forces among the three tribes in the community under study. The findings revealed that spoken language plays a vital role in bringing people together. Others include: the kind of food they eat, their dance styles, music and chants. This finding concurred with the study of Ogundokun (2019) who stated that language is an important tool for communication through which man uses to express himself and make himself understood and that is why the author asserted that African languages should be made as media of instruction in schools in order to advance the bond that exist among a diversified society.

Table 2 also revealed that the responses were generally low on the fact that they shared cultural artifacts amongst themselves. This confirms the fact that despite their closeness in terms of proximity to each other, the Gbayi, Nupe and Kadara tribes have lots of differences and an understanding of each other and these differences will actually foster strong cohesion. This is why Larsen (2013) stated that for social cohesion to be properly established, there should be social trust; and that a general pattern of stability within a pluralised society is the trust that has been established. The finding of this study also revealed that all the respondents agreed to the fact that their indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage actually promoted unity among the different tribes; as corroborated by Amin (2002) who that cultural heritage gave a sense of togetherness and belonging to other tribes in the community.

Conclusion

It is clear from the findings of the study that Nigeria is endowed with very rich indigenous and cultural endowment. Common cultural heritage such as: languages, food, dressing styles, ceremonies; that indigenous knowledge was being used to a great extent to strengthen the cords of cohesion among different ethnic groups in Niger State. Moreover, indigenous knowledge coupled with cultural heritage if positively deployed would further strengthen the already existing cords of unity, cohesion and oneness among the selected tribes in Niger State, Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Citizens should be encouraged to teach the younger generation their mother tongue because languages play a vital role in bringing together a diversified society.
2. There should be constant traditional and cultural shows exhibiting the cultural artifacts and heritage of the people.

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