# MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION AS A MECHANISM FOR PROMOTING POSITIVE ETHNICITY IN KENYA

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**Abstract**

*Since the world has become a global village, the need for better understanding and communication among peoples from different cultures is crucial. Common markets, resource shortages, ethnic conflicts, nuclear proliferations, natural disasters, environmental problems, terrorism, epidemics and religious intorelance need the intervention of all nations in the world. Globally, culture is one of the most conspicuous differences that exist among people. Culture defines personal, interpersonal, and societal development of relationships. Education, on the other hand, is an entity that has been used immensely in promoting cultural diversity. Cross-cultural diversity in education is a major dynamic in ensuring positive ethnicity. Negative ethnicity has been a major contributing factor towards the promotion of conflict and destruction of human relationship. In Africa, genocides, civil wars, and hatreds have been propagated by negative ethnicity. In Kenya, negative ethnicity has been instrumental towards social, political, religious, and economic friction. In order to minimize negative ethnicity, multicultural education  is used as a tool for encouraging appreciation of cultural diversity in Kenya.*

Key Words: Culture, multicultural education, ethnicity

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## Introduction

The current society has experienced varying dynamism in culture. Culture has become one of the most shared aspect of the society. Globalization and advancement of technology have heightened the interaction among the people throughout the world. The major area that has been enormously impacted by the cultural dynamism is education. Currently, education has experienced various dynamisms in terms of the necessity to learn other cultures, enhancing diversity, and increasing interaction through understanding and communication. This phenomena in the current education system has warranted the introduction and maintenance of a diversified society of learners. The learners are required to appreciate and maintain relationships with their peers in the education sector. In this phenomena, education can be understood as a cultural transition that results from socialization and enculturation in both the formal and informal learning contexts. Education influences an individual's thinking and behavioral tendencies towards maintaining social cohesion. Therefore, education has become a major tool for cross-cultural learning in the current society. Cross cultural education has enabled the appreciation of the dynamic differences in the people from different backgrounds. The backgrounds can exist in terms of ethnicity, culture, and upbringing.

Culture can be defined as a common aspect of meaning, rules, and customs that apply to a given group of people. It is not conceived as an independent aspect, but a culmination of values that define the people in a unified unavoidable way. Most of the times, culture is learned through phenomena and universal specifications that surround cultural specificities. The specificities are usually defined in terms of genetic and environmental factors that are relevant to the process of learning and development. Multicultural education can therefore be defined as a mixture of cultures that allow the student to be notified of his or her own culture, as well as the culture of other people[1]. Therefore, understanding the role of cross-cultural education in Kenya is one of the major mechanisms for enhancing positive ethnicity in Kenya.

Globally, there has been rising concerns on the differentiation of people in terms of their cultural backgrounds. The ethnic and cultural differentiations usually occur when part of the global population consider themselves superior to others. This cultural differentiation has led to the emergence of civil wars, conflicts, economic deterioration, and sustained rise of social problems. In most countries, social identity has been furnished by the group or tribe of the people. These countries are reluctant to embrace positive cultural identification in order to promote unity and nationalization. During the World War II (1939-1945), there was a rising strife between the Jews and the Christians in the world. The claim that one of the groups was superior to the other was a clear indication of the deterioration of the cultural concept of the society. This led to the massive massacre of innocent people on the basis of their beliefs. In the USA, there were rising cases of segregation of the African Americans and other minority groups. Earlier, the minority groups were segregated and labelled as aliens. This led to the rise of the civil unrest that rocked USA before the 18th century. In Europe, Britain experienced political changes arising from negative ethnicity. At that time, the British population was either Briton or Scottish. However, in the 18th century, this identity which was based on the cultural differences that existed between the two groups changed.

In Africa, negative ethnicity has been evident through political, economic and social perspectives. Negative ethnicity has made the African governments captives on the basis of favoritism. Ethnic orientations have been a major factor that has caused deaths and civil wars in these societies. For example, in 1994, ethnic genocides led to the death of about one million people in Rwanda, because of the ethnic group superiority complex. In Sudan, there has been a loss of two million people due to ethnic differences. Other countries that have been the subjects of these negative ethnicities are Uganda,

Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The ethnic differences are precipitated by the escapist mentality of blaming each other and prejudice against a given community or groups. At some instances, the ethnic and cultural issues have been linked to the 17th- 18th century invasion of Africa for slaves. As a result, the communities in Africa decided to live in isolation, suspicion, and mistrust of each other. This factor is still strongly evident in the African systems of government. Most of the times, the political renditions and offices are decided on the basis of group affiliations. The leaders of Africa, mostly depend on the majority population strategy in getting the leadership roles. In the end, the society is usually molded as a tool of the superiority complex. The complex is eventually evident in economic development, education, and other structures of the societies. This causes conflict between the antagonistic communities who view each other as enemies[2]. For example, the 2007 general elections in Kenya led to the loss of lives of innocent people on the basis of political and tribal affiliations. Other African countries such as Uganda, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Somalia have experienced the same problem. The introduction of multicultural education would encourage ethnic and cultural torelation in societies.

## Negative Ethnicity in Kenya

In Kenya, negative ethnicity has been a major problem that requires intervention. Like other African countries, Kenya is made up of people from different cultures, tribes, religions, races, colors, and social backgrounds. These people from different backgrounds have alienated themselves in terms of tribe, political affiliation, and socio-economic status. The problem is compounded with the fact that Kenya has 42 tribes that are distributed among the 47 counties. The tribes have differentiated themselves on the ideology that some of the ethnic groups are superior to others, and therefore deserve a greater share of the resources. On the other hand, the minority groups are considered to be inferior, thus deserving less share. This claim has led to the rise of antagonism between communities with an ultimate goal of eliminating each other politically, culturally, and eventually physically. Without the restoration and incorporation of sanity, Kenya stands to suffer vehemently in the hands of negative ethnicities. Ostensibly, the ethnic survival is not defined by the ethnic elites, but it opens avenues for exploitation by other categories of elites.

The origin of negative ethnicity in Kenya can be traced back to the precolonial and post-colonial era. The settlers arrived in Kenya with the aim of promoting economic imperialism. However, the eventual impact was the grabbing of land and support of communities that collaborated with them. Though there existed conflicts between the Kenyan tribes, the settlers heightened the mistrust between the Kenyan tribes. After independence in 1963, Kenya was regarded as the most stable country in the region. After the transition to multiparty democracy in the 1990s, the reputation of Kenya changed due to the rise of the simmering rivalries between ethnic groups. For example, in 1992, Kenya experienced one of the most profound inter-ethnic conflict in  Nyanza, Coast, Western, and the Rift Valley Provinces. The problem was related to politics, ethnicity, and governance. In the 1997 and 2007 general elections, the image of Kenya was further tainted by the negative publicity it accrued from the post-election violence. The violence was linked to the ethnic as well as socio-economic differences among the people living in those provinces. The impacts of the negative ethnicity included the loss of lives, property, and eviction of people from their homes. The conflict predisposed the people to a life of fear and distrust, which is being experienced in Kenya today.

Education is one of the areas that has been greatly affected by the negative ethnicity in Kenya. The distribution of education, land, economic resources, and social resources have been greatly undermined by negative ethnicity[3]. For example, institutions of higher learning have become areas of major interest in terms of distribution and balances.. The distribution of public universities has been affected by the

imbalance in the regional concentrations as some regions lack public institutions. The population of the public institutions of higher learning is also founded on the principle of regional background. That means that these institutions are located in certain areas, while other areas are devoid of any institution. Available data from the ministry of education indicate that the patterns of enrollment in educational institutions are dependent on the colonial development policy that promoted regional imbalances. This phenomena has potentiated the differences in the regional access to education. Communities that come from regions with high resource endowment such as Nairobi, benefit from the proximity to these facilities, while regions such as Turkana, Mandera, Marsabit, and Lodwar do not have such facilities and have to travel to other provinces in search of them Therefore, these regional imbalances are instrumental in promoting negative ethnicity. Another negative ethnicity is founded on the performance of students at the different levels of education. Social inequalities have affected academic performance among the students. The students from rich backgrounds have a higher probability of attaining education to post-graduate levels. The regional imbalances in economic endowments has increased the likelihood of children from the less endowed backgrounds dropping out of school. This situation has further magnified the ethnic aspect of impunity in Kenya. At the local level, most of the institutions enroll students from the locality. The students from regions without such facilities may not access education and if they do, they face challenges in terms of coping and amalgamation into the diverse group. Therefore, cross cultural education is an instrument that can be effective towards the introduction of positive ethnicity in Kenya.

## Multicultural education and Positive ethnicity

Multicultural education is a mechanism that allows the student to mix with students from his culture or other cultures. The aim of this system of education is to enrich the relationship that exists between cultural communities through sharing, learning, listening, and being open to change. This system is an intentional system of community building that incorporates two or more cultures. The learning allows for the acknowledgement of the cultures without the collective transformation of the student. The major aim of the program is to provide learning and exposure to different cultures, without forcing change of the student's culture. The strategy involves formal learning, apprenticeship, and informal learning. The formal learning is predetermined through the number of years a student takes in school, the curriculum, teaching, and the organization of the education system. In Kenya, there are 42 tribes whose cultures are distinct. The use of the cross-cultural education offers an opportunity for learning about different cultures that are shared by the students. The ability of these students to learn the aspect of cultural diversity forms the quagmire of combating negative ethnicity in Kenya in order to enhance national cohesion among the different communities.

According to the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC), national cohesion and integration can be defined as a process of installing and enabling Kenyan citizens to have a feeling of belonging, shared challenges and opportunities, and common enterprise. Cohesion encompasses unity, freedom, equality, democracy, peace, the rule of law, and social justice. The system identifies different cultural, social, and educational identities. In cross-cultural education, institutions are established on the basis of promoting equality of opportunity for all students in the country. The system also accepts students from outside Kenya through exchange programs or regular and part-time enrollment. Cross-cultural education can be used as a way of sojourning learning among different cultural groups. This learning encompasses the formal, informal, and an apprenticeship form of learning. Informal learning is mainly formulated towards the institution of personality dynamics in the students. The personality dynamics arise from the contact with different cultural groups in their education tenure. They can become acquainted with the other culture, hence leading to their understanding of the counterpart's culture. The eventual impact involves the appreciation and trust of the other culture.[4] For example, a

student exposed to the other culture may be devoid of the prejudices that are mostly assumed in the community. The long-term effect of such an acquaintance will make the student accept the differences between communities. Therefore, the eventual impact of such a system encourages positive ethnicity among these students.

Multicultural education is also instrumental in the symbiotic transfer of learning. Education is an exchange of ideas between two groups of people. Cross cultural education unites students from different cultures, who interact with each other. They become classmates, friends, and share the common goal of success. Interaction between the groups allows them to learn from each other, through the common activities, and common errands they undertake. When the students get back to their cultures, they can apply part of what they learn from their friends, and eventually  transfer some of these attitudinal changes to the people in their community. The impact of such relationship is the peaceful coexistence between students from different communities; thus appreciation of different cultures is promoted, and this in turn enhances promotion of  cultural unity.[5] In the Kenyan situation, the prejudgments on the basis of culture and ones background is suppressed and peaceful coexistence is promoted, hence encouraging positive ethnicity. The opportunities of cross-cultural education allow for a strategic placement of the social status of the students. Education attracts people from higher and lower strata of the society. It also attracts the students from both the prejudiced superior and inferior cultures, marginalized cultures, and external cultures in Kenya. The education institutions provide an equal forum of interrelationship among students. The social amenities are equally available to all students despite their origin. All students conform to a given set of rules and expectations as they aim towards success despite the differences in their abilities. At the same time, the parents and guardians from different cultures have the common goal of witnessing the success of their children and this collective promotion of a similar goal of success provides the cross-cultural strategy for social change. Acceptance by other people become evident when the segments of the society come together and become a part of multiculturism. The individuals do not change their culture, but their evaluation of other cultures changes. The appreciation of the interpersonal differences in culture promotes a unified society and the negative ethnicity of hatred and blame is minimized or eliminated altogether.

## Multicultural Education and the Kenyan Constitution

 In Kenya the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) Diversity and Ethnic Adult Service (2011) found that over 50 per cent of Kenya's ethnic groups are marginally represented in the civil service. Some 23 ethnic groups have less than one per cent presence in the civil service. County governments are under a constitutional and legal obligation to promote national values including harmonious relations and respect for diversity by addressing the problem of exclusion, discrimination and marginalization. Kenyan laws in their totality place duties of equality, non-discrimination, equity, fairness, transparency, accountability, diversity and meritocracy on the county governments. In addition, specific stipulations protect non-dominant groups and groups that have been the subject of historical exclusion, discrimination and marginalization. This legal framework places an obligation on county governments to actualise these rights. County governments are expected to apply minimal legal criteria on the one hand and in addition to actualise the specified standards and principles in a manner that accords with the purpose and spirit of the constitution and the goal of building a cohesive society. The National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) calls upon the leadership of each county government to acknowledge and demonstrate their support for these minimum standards, guiding principles and their objectives. The National Cohesion and Integration act prohibits discrimination on the basis of ethnicity in the public sector, including county public service. It further sets a threshold

which bars all public authorities, including county governments, from having a maximum of one third (1/3) of the staff from the same ethnic group.[6] The County Governments Act provides that, in selecting candidates for appointment, The County Public Service Board shall consider the need to assure that at least thirty per cent (30%) of the vacant posts at entry level are filled by candidates who are not from the dominant ethnic community in the county. It is important to clarify that this provision is a minimum threshold and does not aim to protect the majority or "dominant ethnic community" by ring-fencing seventy per cent of the positions in the county public service for them. It instead aims to protect the minorities or the marginalized groups by guaranteeing their inclusion in public service.

What does equality and freedom from discrimination entail? Article 10 and 27 of the Kenyan constituition specifies that individuals or groups may not be discriminated against. This means that they cannot be handled differently because of their characteristics such as language, religion, culture, national or social origin, gender, caste, birth, descent or any other status. This requires that a person or a group of persons may not be treated less (or more) favourably than another person (on grounds of ethnicity, religion, etc.) or group of persons in a similar or comparable situation. One of the most confusing aspects of non-discrimination is that it does not always prohibit institutions from treating people differently, and in some cases requires that they do so. This is because the principles of non-discrimination and equality interact with each other. For example, the historic and long-term discrimination against persons with disabilities as a group has led to people with disabilities not to enjoy full equality with other people. To remedy this, the government has taken measures known as "affirmative action" whose objective is to achieve equality, and they often do so by treating people with disabilities in a way that accords them some comparative advantage such as reserving two seats for them in the senate. Although such actions effectively treat people differently, they are not considered "discrimination", because the goal is to overcome disadvantages and achieve equality. Article 27 of the constitution further specifies that the County governments shall ensure and demonstrate inclusiveness and diversity in the process of recruitment and appointment of public servants. What does incluseveness and diversity entail? A key object of devolution is to foster national unity by recognizing diversity. A key guiding principle in public service is the requirement for representation of Kenya's diverse communities. This is not based merely on tolerance, but rather on respect and value for diversity.[7] The absence of diversity can result in disproportionate representation or exclusion in public service and this will negatively affect cohesion and integration. Lack of diversity can be a factor contributing to mistrust between different groups and is thus a barrier to building cohesion. While the Kenyan courts have recognized the importance of diversity, indicating that it entails a balancing act between competence, competitiveness and achieving the ethnic and regional diversity, they also indicated the progressive realization of this principle. In the interest of the nation and in full recognition of the responsibility and obligation of county governments, they should demonstrate the efforts made in this regard.

## Conclusion

In todays age of globalization and the accompanying rapid social transformation, nations meet new opportunities and face complex challenges of ethnic diversity. A great number of people have been forced to move to other countries in order to escape poverty or wars in their countries and in the hope of finding a better life. Global migration affects political, and cultural global landscape as it links countries of origin and countries of destination. This movement both enriches and distablilizes the demographic dynamics of destinations societies. As a result, ethnic tensions and conflicts continue to flare-up in societies around the world. The experience of ethnic conflicts in the world, and Kenya in particular, has made institutions of learning put emphasis on multicultural education. Multicultural education can be viewed as a tool for enhancing positive ethnicity in Kenya. The socio-cultural challenges that are faced

in Kenya arise from the ethnic identities of the people. The ethnic groups view themselves as either superior or inferior. The alienation of this bias in the minds of the people is essential towards the achievement of national cohesion and integration. The education system is instrumental in ensuring that the society is founded on a foundation of mutual respect, interrelationship, and appreciation. Multicultural education encompasses the formal, informal, and the apprenticeship ways of learning. This strategy is essential in curbing socio-cultural challenges such as negative ethnicity, ethnocentrism, illiteracy levels, and the deterioration of morals and values.

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