

**“we and them”: An examination of ethnic discrimination and
ethnic representations in a selected Nigerian private
Universities**

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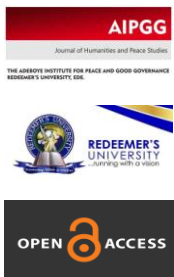
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Abstract:

The present study using a mixed method research approach seeks to explore the experience of tribalism and ideas held about their own and other ethnic groups among a cohort of young adults in Nigeria. It specifically examined the frequency of experiences of ethnic based discrimination using the General Ethnic Discrimination Scale. It also examined ideas held about own and other ethnic groups and sources of information about other ethnic groups. The sample consisted of 140 undergraduate students in the Redeemer's University, Ede, Nigeria. The three major ethnic groups were represented in the sample (Yoruba, 47.8%; Igbos, 29.2%; Hausa, 14.2%). Majority of the participants experienced ethnic based discrimination mostly in informal settings and reported multiple sources of the ideas they hold about their own and other ethnic groups. Two salient themes emerged from an analysis of responses patterns about ideas of own and other ethnic groups: defensive self-reports and responses centered on conduct and behaviour. Data from the study emphasizes the interplay of factors that may contribute to the formation of and experience of tribalism

and reveal that most young adults have formed ideas about their own and other ethnic groups mostly from their peer group. It is envisaged that the findings from this study will be useful in structuring policies geared towards building a sustainable peaceful Nigerian state.

Keywords: ethnicity, tribalism, young adults, national integration

Introduction

The renewal of ethnic separatist agitations in Nigeria after nearly six decades of independence has inspired a consideration of the representations that her citizens hold of their own tribe and others. Tribalism, the practice of harboring a strong feeling of loyalty to one's tribe that excludes 'others' who do not belong to that group¹ has been a common subject of academic inquiry across time and place. As Achebe² explains, tribalism is simply discrimination against a citizen because of his/her place of origin.

Nigeria is located in Western Africa and has since its independence remained a multi-ethnic nation state, and arguably one of the most tribally diverse countries in the world³ with over 250 ethnic groups⁴. The predominant ethnic groups are the Yorubas which are mainly found in the South West, the Igbos in the South East and some parts of the South-South and the Hausas in the North⁵. Despite these variations in culture, language and norms, the innate requirement of humans in any given geographical location to interact with others is present in Nigeria

¹Nothwehr, Dawn M., and Frederic H. Haynes. That they may be one: Catholic social teaching on racism, tribalism, and xenophobia. Orbis Books, 2008.

²Achebe, Chinua. The trouble with Nigeria. Heinemann, 1997.

³Ukiwo, Ukoha. "The study of ethnicity in Nigeria." Oxford Development Studies 33, no. 1 (2005): 7-23.

⁴ National Bureau of Statistics (2017). Nigeria: Facts and figures. Available at <http://www.nigerianstats.gov.ng/>

⁵National Bureau of Statistics (2017). Nigeria: Facts and figures

as in other places. It is this innate need to interact that makes conflict an inevitable aspect of human interaction. While conflicts can serve positive purposes if managed adequately, in multi ethnic societies such as Nigeria, conflict management may be protracted and complex⁶. The body of literature on national conflicts has highlighted the salience of tribal interaction as a major variable⁷. Consequently, an understanding of several aspects of ethnic interaction is an essential step in building a sustainable and peaceful Nigerian society.

The paper will use the terms 'tribalism and ethnicity', 'tribe and ethnic group' interchangeably. Although, some researchers opine otherwise⁸, we use both terms in order to effectively capture the literature and to portray a wide angle view of the study aims and its use in the local parlance in Nigeria. We define ethnicity/tribalism as the employment of ethnic identity and difference in order to gain advantage in situations of conflict, cooperation or competition⁹ for two reasons. First, it infers that ethnicity; in the sense that it confers identity, can serve a positive function as reflected in cooperative behaviour such as community development groups. Secondly, it reveals that ethnicity is a product of conscious actions by social actors¹⁰ which is central to the thrust of the current study.

Early research in the tribalism literature in Nigeria has traced the origin of tribalism to the after effects of policies in the colonial

⁶Osaghae, Eghosa E. *Ethnicity in Africa or African ethnicity*. 1994.

⁷ Ukiwo, The study of ethnicity in Nigeria, 10; Adetiba, Toyin Cotties, and Aminur Rahim. "Towards Ethnic Conflict Management in Nigeria: The Adoption of a Multi-party Democracy." (2012).

⁸Appiah, Kwame Anthony. "Ethnicity and identity in Africa: An interpretation." *Africana: The encyclopedia of the African and African American experience*. New York: Basic Books (1999); Wiley, David. "Using." *New England Social Studies Bulletin* 39, no. 2 (1982): 15-17; Paglia, Pamela. "Ethnicity and Tribalism: Are These the Root Causes of the Sudanese Civil Conflicts?." *Africa Economic Analysis* (2007).

⁹Osaghae, Eghosa E. *Ethnicity in Africa or African ethnicity*. 1994.

¹⁰Ukiwo, The study of ethnicity in Nigeria, 12

era¹¹. However, three major factors were identified in the literature; ethnic socialization, modernization and scarcity of resources.

Ethnic socialization has been most implicated factor in the tribalism discourse. The manner in which an individual is prepared to become an active member of the society involves transfer of ideas about behaviour and communication on understanding and interacting with members of one's own ethnic group and other ethnic groups¹². Ethnic socialization especially targets the young who are still actively learning what is acceptable and unacceptable¹³. This socialization is usually carried out by common units of socialization especially through the family and immediate environment where ethnic identity is formed and consequently crystallized or disintegrated by experience¹⁴. Osinubi & Osinubi¹⁵ found that ethnicity to be the strongest type of identity among Nigerians.

Studies on the mediating effect of modernization on ethnicity is ambivalent. The modernization theory of ethnicity posits that advances in communication, transportation and integrated development will aid a sense of nationalism rather than a sole ethnic identity¹⁶. Proponents of the essentialist school of thought of ethnic conflicts point out that the major premise of the modernization school of thought was derived from the

¹¹Ogundiran, Akinwumi. "Themes and Directions in the History of Precolonial Nigeria." Ogundiran (Ed.), Precolonial Nigeria: Essays in Honor of Toyin Falola (2005): 3-50.

¹²Olu-Adeyemi, Lanre. "Ethno-Religious Conflicts and The Travails of National Integration in Nigeria's Fourth Republic." Accessed 14/1 (2006).

¹³Bentley, Keisha L., Valerie N. Adams, Howard C. Stevenson, Helen A. Neville, Brendesha M. Tynes, and Shawn O. Utsey. "Handbook of African American Psychology." (2009): 255.

¹⁴Olu-Adeyemi, Lanre. "Ethno-Religious Conflicts, Accessed 14/1 (2006).

¹⁵Osinubi, Tokunbo Simbowale, and Oladipupo Sunday Osinubi. "Ethnic conflicts in contemporary Africa: The Nigerian experience." Journal of Social Science 12, no. 2 (2006): 101-114.

¹⁶Ukiwo, The study of ethnicity in Nigeria, 12

antecedents of other countries such as the United States of America which is referred to as the melting pot of several cultures¹⁷. While these efforts may have been achieved in some respect especially in locations such as Lagos and Port Harcourt becoming a melting point for various ethnic groups, diverse factors define the nomenclature of ethnic groups in Nigeria; a common language, story of common origin, a primary territory and in most cases, shared religious beliefs¹⁸. Consequently, tribalism has taken on other forms which are often subtle and covert in modern societies.

The three major ethnic groups constitute only 57% of the population of Nigeria¹⁹, while other ethnic groups are referred to as minorities. While this may be acceptable in terms of classification, it may engender feelings of inferiority with regards to representation and equity at the national level. Adetiba & Rahim²⁰ point out that when there is inequity in accessing national benefits, ethnicity is most easily identified and manipulated factor in agitating for a state of equity. This may not be far from the truth as most of the conflicts witnessed in Nigeria (for example, the Nigerian civil war, the Niger-Delta crisis), have been resource based fought along the ethnic divide.

A reading of the current literature however suggests that in the wake of modernization, contemporary forms of tribalism are still are still prevalent²¹. Only a few Nigerian studies have explored the experiences, expectations and representations of ethnic groups that young adolescents who are growing in an era of

¹⁷Ukiwo, The study of ethnicity in Nigeria, 15

¹⁸Imuetinyan, Festus, and Ogbeide Uyi-Ekpen. "Federalism, State Creation and the Minority Ethnic Groups in Nigeria's National Integration Project." AFRREV IJAH: An International Journal of Arts and Humanities 5, no. 1 (2016): 86-99.

¹⁹National Bureau of Statistics (2017). Nigeria: Facts and figures

²⁰Adetiba, Toyin Cotties, and Aminur Rahim. "Between ethnicity, nationality and development in Nigeria." International Journal of Development and Sustainability 1, no. 3 (2012): 656-674.

²¹Olu-Adeyemi, Lanre. "Ethno-Religious Conflicts, Accessed 14/1 (2006).

globalization hold. Till date, no Nigerian study has adopted a mixed method approach in researching tribalism and ethnic representations among this cohort. In addition, it is important to examine the sources of these representations as literature suggests that it may help gain considerable insight into tackling tribalism from its root causes. The current subject matter is important as it relates to current and future sustainability of our societies as conceptions of social interaction are developed early in life²².

The present study seeks to present the common representations that students in a private University in South Western Nigeria hold about theirs and other ethnic group in an attempt to analyze the emerging themes from their responses. Furthermore, we hypothesize that participants will report encountering tribalism across several medium of social interaction and that individuals representations of their own tribe and others will be influenced by multiple sources.

Materials and Methods

Respondents consisted of 140 undergraduate students in the Redeemer's University, Ede, Osun State, Nigeria. The Redeemer's University is a privately owned university that attracts students from all over the country reflecting the major ethnic groups. Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Research Committee of the Department of Behavioural Studies, Redeemer's University, Nigeria. Information sheets about the study which emphasized that participation was anonymous, completely voluntary and not attached to any course credit in the university were passed out to students after classes. Information sheets detailing information of what involvement would entail was handed to potential participants. The researcher also gave participants a chance to ask questions and asked potential participants to sign a consent form. All 140 students consented to participate in the research.

²²Olu-Adeyemi, Lanre. "Ethno-Religious Conflicts, Accessed 14/1 (2006).

The present study was conducted using a mixed method research design. Also known as the hybrid approach to research²³, mixed method research design combine elements of quantitative and qualitative tools in a sequential or simultaneous manner²⁴. The present study adopts quantitative tools (standardized questionnaire) to survey the frequency of the experience of tribalism among the participants. Qualitative tools such as open ended questions are adopted to lend 'voice' to the representations that participants hold, that is, how participants think of their own and others' ethnic group. The study was managed in a concurrent transformative mixed method research design.

The instrument used for the present study consisted of three sections. The first section aimed at collecting demographic characteristics of participants such as age, sex and tribe. The second part of the instrument was a slightly modified version of the General Ethnic Discrimination Scale²⁵. The psychometric properties of the scale are well established. Internal consistency estimates for General Ethnic Discrimination Scale ranged between .94 - .95 and a one month test-retest reliability ranged between .95 - .96²⁶. The original scale is an 18- item self-report inventory in which respondents rate the frequency of perceived ethnic discrimination events during the past year and entire life and the appraisal of the resulting stress on a 6 point Likert type

²³Schreier, Margrit, and Nigel Fielding. "Qualitative and quantitative research: Conjunctions and divergences/Qualitative und quantitative Forschung: Übereinstimmungen und Divergenzen." In Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research [Online Journal], vol. 2, no. 1. 2001.

²⁴Tashakkori, Abbas, and Charles Teddlie. Mixed methodology: Combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. Vol. 46. Sage, 1998.

²⁵Landrine, Hope, Elizabeth A. Klonoff, Irma Corral, Senaida Fernandez, and Scott Roesch. "Conceptualizing and measuring ethnic discrimination in health research." Journal of behavioral medicine 29, no. 1 (2006): 79-94.

²⁶Landrine, Hope, and Elizabeth A. Klonoff. African American acculturation: Deconstructing race and reviving culture. Sage Publications, 1996.

scale. The version used for the present study retained only the aspect of the scale that measured frequency of ethnic discrimination since measuring stress resulting from ethnic discrimination as it was beyond the scope of the present study. Furthermore, the 18th item (How different would your life be now, if you had not been treated in a tribalistic and unfair way) was removed as an initial pilot carried out by the researchers revealed that participants found the question confusing. Finally, references to racism were replaced by tribalism. The final part of the instrument consisted of semi structured, open ended questions where participants were allowed to present in their own words, their ideas about other their own and other major ethnic groups in Nigeria and sources of their ideas.

Quantitative data collected was analyzed with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 21.0). Completed questionnaires were collated and numbered and coded on SPSS. Descriptive analysis was employed in analyzing demographic data. Exploratory analysis which included data cleaning and checking each questionnaire for response anomalies. Responses on the GEDS were transformed into three response variables; never, seldom and frequently to allow for clearer analysis of the data.

Thematic analysis was employed in analyzing data obtained from open ended questions. Thematic analysis offers an accessible and flexible approach to analyzing semi qualitative data which can provided a rich and detailed account of individual's experiences of a certain phenomenon²⁷. All responses were analyzed in line with Braun & Clarke's²⁸ recommendations for using thematic analysis. The researchers proceeded with data analysis by producing a transcript of all responses to open ended questions. The researchers then proceed to categorize responses according to tribal affiliations.

²⁷Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. "Using thematic analysis in psychology." *Qualitative research in psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77-101.

²⁸ Virginia, and Victoria. Using thematic analysis, 79

Analysis began with an initial reading of the transcript by two researchers in order to familiarize with the data corpus and noting down initial ideas. Subsequent readings of the transcript led to generation of themes which were prevalent in the entire data set. Each theme was then reviewed among the three researchers for prevalence and eventual themes were named and defined before the production of the final report.

A preliminary analysis was conducted to evaluate responses to sources of information about representations of others and one's own ethnic group. Additional analysis performed on responses on ideas about ethnic groups revealed two main themes; defensive self-report, and responses centered on conduct and behavioural qualities. The data corpus was rechecked to ascertain the presence of isolated themes. None was found. Defensive self-report responses were characterized by members of an ethnic group acknowledging the negative ideas held by members of other ethnic groups and providing an explanation or positive reason for the trait. In addition, most of the responses about self and others ethnic group were centered on overt behaviour and traits. Quotations from the data are included as a justification for reported themes and to ensure that participant's account are preserved.

Results

Participants in the present study were aged between 16-26 years with a mean age of 18.4 years. Almost half (47.8%) of the respondents identified as Yoruba, Igbos (29.2%), Hausa (14.2%) and other ethnic groups constituted 8.6% of the sample. Demographic characteristics of participants are presented in

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of participants

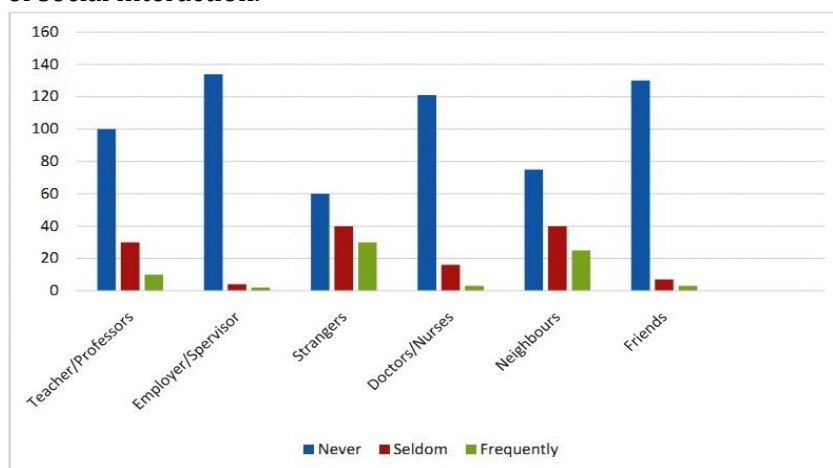
Variable	Level	Frequency
Gender	Male	52
	Female	88
Ethnicity	Yoruba	67

	Igbo	41
	Hausa	20
	Others	12
Religion	Christianity	130
	Islam	3
	Others	7
Marital status	Single	135
	Married	4
	Divorced	1

Source: Author

Statistical analysis revealed that participants encountered ethnic discrimination mostly in informal settings; strangers and neighbours. Hence, our hypothesis that participants will report encountering ethnic discrimination across several medium of social interaction was partially confirmed. Figure 1 below shows the frequency of the experience of discrimination experienced by participants from major sources of social interaction.

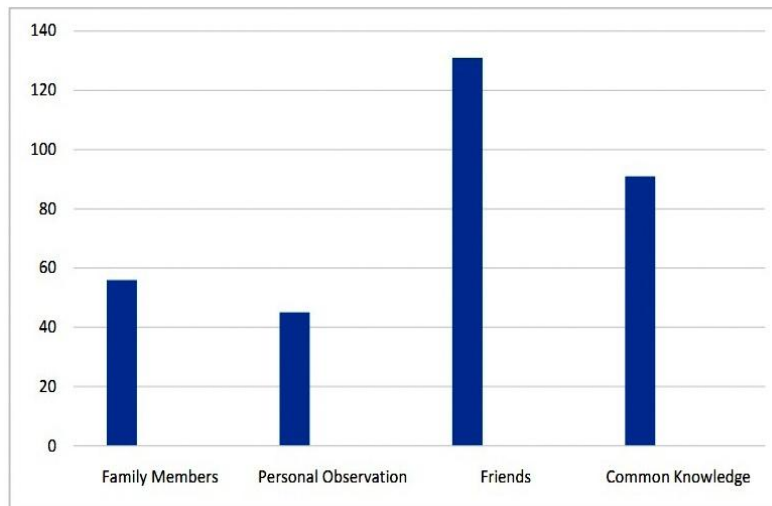
Figure 1: Frequency distribution of the experience of discrimination experienced by participants from major sources of social interaction.



Source: Author

The hypothesis that participants will report multiple sources of the ideas they hold about their own tribe and other tribes was confirmed. Figure 2 depicts the sources of ideas that young people hold about their own and other ethnic group. The data reveals that most the ideas that most participants held about their own ethnic group and other ethnic group originate from friends and common knowledge.

Figure 2: Frequency distribution of sources of ideas that young people hold about their own and other ethnic group.



Source: Author

Discussion

The study considered three broad areas of interest among a cohort of youths; frequency of ethnic based discrimination, ideas held about self and other ethnic groups and sources of information about other ethnic groups. The data presented in the present study emphasizes the interplay of factors that may contribute to the formation of and experience of tribalism.

Frequency of Discrimination

The data suggests an overall infrequent experience of ethnic discrimination in the present cohort. The least amount of discrimination was from groups with which participants had professional or personal relationships with. This is not entirely surprising as doctors, teachers and employers are trained to relate with others in a professional way that is free of bias. Rogers and Tudeme²⁹ in their study on tribalism in the Nigerian Police Force reported that police officers felt tribal affiliation played an important role in hiring practices, assignment postings and remuneration. The variation in the result among other factors may be due to the military system of government in place at the time of the study.

However, it is interesting to note that participants reported experiencing ethnic discrimination most from informal relationships; strangers and neighbours. As data from the current study suggests, most Nigerians have grounded ideas about their own tribe and others. It may be the case that because strangers have mostly situational contact with each other, they may project ideas of the other ethnic groups in relating with them³⁰ since it is possible in most cases in Nigeria to predict ethnic affiliation by name. The Nigerian family system has become more nuclear in orientation, with the massive rural-urban drift, individuals tend to live more in nuclear settings where they have little or no contact with each other³¹. It is therefore possible that individuals may be neighbours yet have little or no contact with each other hence projecting preconceived ideas of a certain ethnic group on their own neighbours.

²⁹Rogers, Robert, and Augustine Tudeme. "Tribalism in the Nigeria police force." *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice* 20, no. 1 (1996): 129-146.

³⁰Olu-Adeyemi, Lanre. "Ethno-Religious Conflicts, Accessed 14/1 (2006).

³¹Ajaero, Chukwuedozie K., and Patience C. Onokala. "The effects of rural-urban migration on rural communities of southeastern Nigeria." *International Journal of Population Research* 2013 (2013).

Ideas about self and other ethnic groups

The data set reveals that the participants held ideas about their own and others' tribes as all the participants reported ideas about their own and other ethnic groups. This result echoes Banon, Miguel & Posner³² assertion that ethnic identity is the most common representation of self among Africans in popular imagination. Two salient themes emerged in the analysis of participants' response about the ideas they hold about their own ethnic group and other ethnic groups; 'defensive self-report and responses centered on conduct and behaviour'.

Defensive Self- Reports. Most of the respondents were aware of some of the ideas that individuals from other tribes held about their own tribe and defended these ideas, in a sense presenting a positive aspect to a reported negative trait. Consequently, traits that other tribes presented as negative were presented as positive with justification for the positive view that was adopted. Throughout the data set, a conspicuous idea that other tribes held about the Yoruba tribe was that they loved to party and had salutations for every occasion.

As one Igbo participant reports;

"They love parties. They throw parties even when broke"

Another Hausa participant echoes this;

"They like fun and loud parties"

Most Yoruba participants not only self-reported these trait but reported a positive view of this trait.

As a Yoruba participant reports;

"Yoruba people are the life of the party, beautiful people, can be loud but that makes us fun to be with"

Another Yoruba respondent self- reports a pattern of greeting among the Yoruba. She reports

"They say we greet too much for every occasion, but that only means that we are respectful and well cultured".

³²Bannon, A., E. Miguel, and N. D. Posner. "Sources of ethnic identification in Africa (Afrobarometer Working Paper No. 44)." Cape Town, South Africa: Institute for Democracy in South Africa (2004).

Most non-Igbo respondents pointed out a pattern of money consciousness among the Igbos.

As one Yoruba respondent reports

“Igbos are money conscious and can cheat for money”.

This was confirmed by a Hausa respondent that;

“Igbo people love money too much, they can sacrifice their parents for money”

As expected, most Igbo participants self- reported this pattern but in a positive manner.

An Igbo participant reports;

“Igbos love business, but are often misunderstood to be lovers of money”

Another Igbo participant reports;

“Most people misunderstand our enterprising trait for love of money, we are the most enterprising tribe in this country”

Most non Hausa participant held ideas about members of the Hausa ethnic group as unassuming and a tendency to religious fanaticism.

An Igbo participant reports;

“Hausa people are very content with what they have but they are religious fanatics”

A Yoruba participant echoes this idea;

“Hausa people appear simple but they have killed people the most in this country because they are fanatics”.

Responses centered on conduct and behaviour. An in depth analysis of the data set revealed that most respondents expressed ideas about their own tribe and other tribes in terms of behavioural qualities and conduct using a combination of positive and negative adjectives.

Table 2: Summary of the most frequent responses about the conduct and behaviour of other tribes.

Tribe	Most frequent Descriptive Adjective
Hausa	Beautiful, Loyal, Honest, Violent, Cattle headers, Terrorists, Religious fanatics, Beggars, Dirty, Unlearned, Carefree, Unassuming
Igbo	Business oriented, Money lovers,

	Smart, Entrepreneurial, Disrespectful, Hardworking, Industrious, Tribalistic, Protect women
Yoruba	Respectful, Party lovers, Friendly, Loud/Noisy, Lavish, Educated, Fun loving, Well behaved, Tribalistic, Wicked, Dirty, Traditional, Well learned, Accommodating, Hypocrites

Source: Author

Sources of Ideas about self and other ethnic groups *Sources of Ideas about self and other ethnic groups*

The literature on sources of influence in adolescent strongly suggests that the peer group play a significant role in the identity formation in the adolescent years (³³Berndt, 1992; ³⁴Rageliene, 2016). It is not surprising that friends were the main source of the ideas that participants in the present study held about their own and other ethnic groups. This suggests that the youths play an active role in the transfer of ideas about their own and others ethnic groups.

Limitations

It is important to note that when interpreting the results of the present study that there are a number of limitations specific to the present study, particularly relating to the sample. The participants consisted of young adults between ages 16 and 26 who still live at home and have limited experiences in the world

³³Berndt, Thomas J. "Friendship and friends' influence in adolescence." Current directions in psychological science 1, no. 5 (1992): 156-159.

³⁴Ragelienė, Tija. "Links of Adolescents Identity Development and Relationship with Peers: A Systematic Literature Review." Journal of the Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry 25, no. 2 (2016): 97.

of work. If the present cohort was compared to an older cohort, a difference in findings may emerge. It would be interesting to see how these results compare.

It is worth noting that the sample was drawn from a private university where most of the students represent the upper middle class and the higher socio economic status and are presently studying for a degree. In this regard, the sample may not represent the experiences of the general population of youths; the results however provide unique insights into the experience of ethnic discrimination in the present cohort and the ideas they hold about their own and other tribes.

Recommendations

The data from the present study suggests several key points young people can play in the building of a sustainable and peaceful Nigerian society. First, there is strong evidence to suggest that young people are actively being socialized into ideas that may not be accurate about their own and other ethnic groups. Since conceptualizations about life are formed at this stage, it is then important that national stakeholders make accurate information geared towards national integration available to the young. The effective modification of perception of other ethnic groups is an important prerequisite towards building sustainable peace in Nigeria especially for the next generation. This is vital as it lends a futuristic outlook as young people eventually become leaders and policy makers.

In addition, school curriculums should be revised to promote a sense of national character in an attempt to moderate the dominant ideas about ethnic groups. Regional school trips should be encouraged to engender an appreciation of the diversity of the country. Corporate organizations should also be encouraged to engage in corporate social projects geared towards national integration.

Development in technology has promoted information sharing especially among young adults. Adopting youth friendly means of

promoting campaigns geared at disseminating practical information on national integration such as inter-ethnic marriage and full participation in the National Youth Service Corp scheme. More research into this area is encouraged especially those that adopt mixed methods approach. Many of the respondents expressed how much they enjoyed participating in the study as it helped them express their feelings about other ethnic groups that they have been unable to express.

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