

THE ROLE OF CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN IMPROVING DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

PALMER ISITE ODOGBOR

*Department of Social Studies,
Delta State College of Physical Education,
Mosogar.*

Abstract

Democratization process has not been an easy task in the effort at ushering in nationhood since independence in 1960. This is factored by the multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic nature of the Nigerian society. This situation has adverse divisive effect on the entire polity as each of the ethnic groups asserts its influence on others. Consequently, Nigerians have come to realize that democracy has now metamorphosed into military rule, characterized by instability, violence, anarchism etc. In line with this scenario, Nigerian leaders have initiated/mounted some programmes and strategies aimed at ensuring lasting democracy in the country. However, all the measures and strategies adopted so far, has not addressed the situation in any way. The thrust of this paper is therefore to x-ray the prospects of achieving lasting democracy in Nigeria through Citizenship Education.

Nigeria got her independence from British in 1960 and thus, she was moulded in the British colonial social, economic and political image. The parliamentary system which Nigeria inherited from Britain was glut with myriad of loopholes and weaknesses which did not go well with the Nigerian nation, as disunity, insecurity, tension, is now the order of the day. The parliamentary system brought a lot of insecurity, violence, kidnapping, political assassinations as currently being witnessed in many parts of the country especially in the northern parts of Nigeria.

Consequently, rivalry now exists among the political parties especially the two major political parties - the All Progressive Congress (APC), and the ruling People Democratic Party (PDP). This led to series of impeachment in many parts of the states and this has further heightened the political rivalry. This state of affair is an indication that we are not yet “ripe” for sustainable democracy.

Nigeria as a nation should know that the time to right the wrong is now, by internalizing the tenet of citizenship education.

Definition of Citizenship Education

Citizenship Education has been defined by different scholars. To Morrissett (1981), citizenship education is the conscious effort to educate youths about certain subject areas, mostly with strong value emphasis. Uche (1980) viewed citizenship education as the preparation of the child for social responsibility. This definition is very apt to the needs and problems of Nigeria (Agholor, 2010). The nation has been yearning for citizens who are not only aware of what benefits and opportunities the society promises but also what they stand to contribute towards the wellbeing of the society. This is in line with the patriotic slogan of former American president, J. F. Kennedy, that Americans should not think of what the nation can do for them but what they can do for the nation.

In analyzing the concept of citizenship education, Iyamu(1992), looked at citizenship education from a general perspective. He opined that it generally refers to that aspect of formal education programmes which emphasizes the wellbeing and efficiency of individuals and society.

From the forgoing, citizenship education can be defined as the education aimed at making the citizens to be good citizens of the state or country.

Objectives of Citizenship Education

Ibezim (2010), identified the following as the objectives of citizenship education:

- a. prepare the students to be able to identify and exercise their civic rights and responsibilities.
- b. enable government appreciate the state objectives and responsibilities
- c. help the students appreciate their economic, political, social, cultural and physical environment.
- d. enable students to appreciate the workings of democracy and be able to apply democratic principles anywhere they find themselves.
- e. enable students develop the abilities to adapt to changing economic, social, cultural, political and physical environment.
- f. enable the students to device necessary intellectual and political tools for improving the social and physical environment.
- g. enable students acquire the necessary skills and techniques for analysing social events, for instance, causes of political unrest, purpose of youth movement, inflation.
- h. inculcate in the students the ideals of good leadership and followership.
- i. inculcate in the students the desire to ask for information concerning the government of the day, its essence and offer useful suggestions on the success of good governance.

Constraints to the Emergence of Democratic System in Nigeria

The leading constraints militating against the emergence of good democratic culture can be attributed to the following:

First, for fifty three (53) years since the nation's independence, Nigeria has not been blessed with a charismatic, patriotic, selfless and visionary leader to man their affairs in the path of democratic governance, justice, peace and progress. Many scholars and commentators have attributed the problem of Nigeria as purely leadership failure. This manifests in the unwillingness or inability of Nigerian leaders to rise to their responsibilities and to the challenges of leading by example (Zaria and Shamija (2005). The Nigerian leadership have refused to understand that the challenge of leadership is that government must remain responsive to popular wishes in order to foster a sense of belonging. For instance, from 1999 till date, there is lack of patriotism on the part of the leadership capable of entrenching national unity, stability, peace and progress. One undoubtedly sees that the greatest woes that has befallen this country is that of purposeless and visionless leadership (Zaria and Shamija, 2005).

Another hindrance to the emergence of democracy in Nigeria is the poor way elections are managed in Nigeria. From independence till date, election years are always characterized by violence and killing of innocent people. Unless election machineries are properly managed, violence will continue to characterise the polity, especially post-election violence.

Furthermore, corruption among political leaders and other public officers is another constraints to the emergence of democracy in Nigeria. Transparency international still ranked Nigeria 143 out of 182 countries in its 2011 corruption perception index. This is not good for democracy. There is widespread corruption and criminality in Nigeria. The efforts of the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and the Independence Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) are unable to stem the spat of corruption (Akpochofo, 2010).

The Nigeria socio-political terrain provides a very fertile ground for fraudulent practices, thereby leading to the institutionalization of corruption. Lewis (2008), opined that a corrupt society produces corrupt leaders and followers; corrupt leaders establish corrupt institutions and corrupt institution create a multiple of corrupt systems. Corruption has become Nigeria's worst enemy and the political actors have been the most guilty and have by their looting and plundering of the nation's resources, brought us to this level of pain (Ossakwe, 2010).

International financial watchers, believe that Nigeria had major money transferred illegally to foreign lands than any other country in Africa between 1970 and 2008 (Osakwe, 2010). According to SaveNigeria Group (2010), about \$89 billion of

Nigeria funds has been stolen by the corrupt political managers and carted out of the country for safe keeping (Osakwe, 2010). The effects of this looting is abject poverty on the faces of Nigerians.

The Role of Citizenship Education towards the Emergence of Sustainable Democracy

Citizenship education has been considered to be a potent tool through which democracy can be enhanced and sustained for large scale democratic dividends. This is in tune with Iyamus (1992), belief that Citizenship Education ... has a strong evaluative and moral component; whose advocates say that they know what is good for its own youths and society and that they want the youths to accept these judgement (Aghulor, 2010).

Commenting on the definition, Iyamu (1992) reasoned that it is the creation of few members of the society who believes that they have the ideas and potentials to influence individuals and society in the desired direction.

Citizenship education is said to provide knowledge of common historical experience of imperialism, colonialism and nationalist against alien forces (Zaria and Shaija, 2005). By this, one is able to analyse and synchronize issues critically and utilize the historical benefits to proffer solution to similar issues in the future and day to day living

Moreover, knowledge about democracy is better understood through citizenship education, because it has a robust curriculum and co-curricular content that can equip the learner for life as far as democracy is concerned. Citizenship education is most important to any society that wants progress and tranquillity. This is why government has more to do in citizenship education than any other person, body or agency (Ajaegbo and Ibezin, 2010). Citizenship education specifies what every individual should do for the growth and development of the society.

The activities of government, knowledge about right, duties and obligations of citizens are brought to the knowledge of students, through the robust content of citizenship education, thus enhancing student knowledge on democratic practices and working of government.

Finally, citizenship education equips students and the general public with ample knowledge on wide range of issues that will make them stand tall to contribute their quota to issues of national significance that will lead to national development. This is because, citizenship education enhances human development and promotes reasonable

self-assurance among the citizens as it teaches good values, morals and attitude in order to be good citizens of a state or country.

Conclusion

Sustainable democracy in Nigeria is very much linked to citizenship education. Content of citizenship education will awaken the consciousness of the Nigerian citizens to their rights and obligations as citizens. Therefore, as a pre-condition to participate in the governance of the country, the knowledge of citizenship education should be internalized.

Recommendations

It has been argued in many fora that Nigeria has all it takes to be a great country, but unfortunately, she is notwithstanding the blessing the good Lord has bestowed her. Nigeria's efforts at developing or building the country along the path of democracy, equality and social justice has remained a futile effort. Such vices as insecurity, electoral violence, distrust, injustice, lack of commitment to justice, abuse of office, tribalism, ethnicism, poor leadership, corruption and denial of legitimate rights of citizens are the common problems militating against true democratic rule in Nigeria.

Drawing from the above therefore, the paper recommends the following:

- a. Citizenship education should be taught at all levels of education in Nigeria.
- b. Political office holders should be exposed to training in citizenship education.
- c. Nigerians should see the development of the country as a collective duty and not the duty of the leaders alone.
- d. Our leaders should respect the tenet of the constitution and the rule of law.
- e. The Nigerian constitution should be subject to review from time to time, so that obsolete laws can be removed and replaced with new ones as in international best practice.

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