PROBLEMS FACING CIVIC EDUCATION AS A MEANS OF PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN FUTURE ADULTS FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND COHESION

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Abstract

The problem of achieving national development and cohesion is one of the major challenges facing Nigeria today. Lack of national cohesion has had a lot of negative impacts in the society. Obviously, the nation faces a lot of problems such as unstable democratic governance, dearth of popular participation which is a pillar to democracy, religious and cultural intolerance, disunity, negligence of human rights and its value. National development and cohesion cannot exist in the presence of the above problems. Consequently, this article is to create awareness on the impact civic education could have on tackling the above mentioned ills of the nation by promoting democratic governance. This study examined civic education as a means of promoting democratic governance to ensure national development and cohesion and highlighted several problems confronting its implementation in Nigeria. The meanings of national development, national cohesion and civic education were presented and it purposes/aims were outlined. Effort was also made to provide the meaning of democratic governance and, roles of civic education in promoting democratic governance. The researchers recommended among others that; government should make civic education a compulsory subject/course from primary to higher institutions in Nigeria in order to instill the right attitudes, values and civic responsibilities in the students as future adults. Conclusively, civic education is very crucial in creating active citizens willing to participate and contribute to democratic governance which will promote sustainable national development and cohesion.

Keywords: National development, national cohesion, civic education, democratic governance, sustainability, problems.

Introduction

Democracy in Nigeria faced the problem of instability from military takeover in 1966-1999. It is not an over statement that democracy cannot be achieved without citizen participation. It therefore, becomes imperative to have active and informed citizens who will stabilize democracy through active participation in order to promote national integration. As stipulated by Deth (2013), active citizenship is the ability of the people to exercise and defend their democratic rights and responsibilities in the society, value diversity and play an active part in democratic life. Deth averred that, for citizens to be active and understand these activities they need to have the necessary knowledge, skills, attitude and values. The threat to national cohesion assumes many forms including ethnic, regional, religious and class cleavages among others (Olaitan, Audu and Ajibola, 2014). The problems befalling Nigeria's national development and cohesion is so prevalent that the existence of many of her facets, as important national entities, is subject to doubt. As Ujomu in Ibe (2019) observed, the persistent national discord and instability renders meaningless the numerous attempts to find lasting solutions to the problems that pervaded Nigerian society such as poverty, pestilence, illiteracy, inadequate social infrastructure, poor health, unemployment and political disenfranchisement. Thus, civic education becomes an important tool for educating and inculcating in the future adults the ideal actions and behaviours expected of them as good citizens.

There are different definitions to civic education by different scholars but with considerable similarities. The word civic is derived from the Latin word

'civitas', which means citizens. This takes civics to mean discipline of knowledge dealing with the day to day affairs of the state and its citizens (Meron in Ibe 2019). It has taken on different nomenclatures in different countries such as citizenship education, civic engagement, education for democratic citizenship, civic culture, political education and moral education (Vasiljevic, 2009). Baye (2016) defined Civic Education as learning for effective participation in democratic and development processes at both local and national levels. Moreso, civic education is seen as education for democratic citizenship because it is democratically oriented. From this point of view Civic Education comprises three areas or essential components as outlined by Finkel noted in Ibe (2019) as fellows;

1. Civic competence (political knowledge, civic skills and perceptions of one's own political influence that support democratic participation).
2. Adherence to democratic values and norms (tolerance - meaning the extent to which citizens are willing to extend procedural democratic liberties to individuals and groups with whom they may disagree, institutional trust – meaning the willingness to critically support basic social and political institutions; and support for democracy as a form of government preferable to other political systems.
3. Democratic participation (seen as a final outcome of the program, especially local participation).

According to Mill in Vasiljevic (2009), Democracy is defined as the government of the whole people by the whole people, equally represented.

> Democracy is a system of government where institutions function in accordance with democratic processes and norms, both internally and in their interaction with other institutions.

Democratic governance means giving citizens a say in how decisions affecting them and their entry are made. It is fundamental to ensuring that democracy delivers for all of society. Democratic governance is the range of processes through which a society reaches consensus on and implements regulations, human rights, laws, policies and social structures in pursuit of justice, welfare and environmental protections. Strong democratic governance is characterized by transparency and accountability in both the public and private sectors. It is through improved governance that the benefits of democratic development mostly directly impact the lives of citizens. Democratic governance is not autocratic and avoids tyranny.

Development is the process of economic, social, political and cultural change engineered in a given society by the efforts of all stakeholders both internal and external including the local communities, the government, the private sector, the civil society organization , the NGOs and the technical and financial development partners with a view to improving the conditions of the life of the population in a sustainable way (Yilben, 2014).National development in the context of this article could be referred to as stable democratic governance; political stability; existence of popular participation which is a pillar to democracy; religious and cultural tolerance; unity, and recognition of human rights and their value.

National cohesion is incorporation of different ethnic and religious elements of the population into a unified society, providing equal opportunity and equal rights for all members of that society. Olaitan, Audu & Ajibola (2014) asserted that in such a society, an individual's attainment of education, access to any public or private facility, opportunity for employment and ownership of property are neither denied nor limited by reason of race, religion or national origin. Nigeria needs sustainable integration to live as a country in order to grow. Hill, Wilson and Watson (2003), viewed sustainability to be related to ways of thinking about the world and forms of social and personal practice that lead to:

- Ethical, empowered and personality fulfilled individuals
- Community built on collaborative engagement, tolerance and equity
- Social systems and institutions that are participatory, transparent and just
- Environmental practices that value and sustain biodiversity and life supporting ecological processes.

National cohesion (integration) according to Vyas cited in Olaitan et al (2014) means a process as well as a goal by which all the people inhabiting a particular territory irrespective of their religious, ethnic and linguistic differences on the basis of certain shared traditions, experiences, common history and values strive to live together forever with honour and dignity. Olaitan, et al (2014) averred that this definition underscores process and goals of different communities who live together harmoniously by forging a common identity that is shared by all. This emphasizes

such commonalities as love for justice, peace, security, prosperity, values, worldviews, laws and so on.

Importance of Civic Education in Promoting Democratic Governance

Civic education aims at producing individuals with the capacity to go beyond citizens who are passive subjects of the state to those who are well informed and responsible. It should equip citizens with skills to participate and contribute to the development and maintenance of democratic governance and citizenship which eventually leads to the establishment of a stable democratic political system (European Union, 2011). This indicates that civic education plays indispensable role in the development of democratic governance through promoting popular participation which is a basic pillar of democracy. The ultimate purpose of civic education is to create a good citizens who has an intellectual capacity to critically analyze ideas, actively participate in civic life, (including political life), has an admirable character and genuinely cares about the wellbeing of other citizens (Shon, 2015).

According to Vasiljevic (2009), a good citizen is the one who is equipped with appropriate knowledge, skills and traits of character which are instrumental for the good of the public. The whole point is that civic education makes citizens active participants and important assets for peace and democratic governance of a country. Branson, in Birhanu (2012) observed that a good civic education enables students to enjoy their rights and freedom, makes them to respect the freedom of others, consciously discharge their duties and responsibilities, respect the rule of law and

try to solve the problems of the society. Hence, civic education helps students to determine what rights they are endowed with and which responsibilities they are entrusted with as members of a country. This will enable them to properly exercise their rights and carry out their responsibilities in order to contribute to democratic governance and national the development.

The aims of civic education as outlined by Kerry (2012) include:

- To promote knowledge of social, political and civic institutions.
- To promote respect for and safeguard of the environment.
- To promote the capacity to defend one's own point of view.
- To develop students' skills and competencies in conflict resolution.
- To promote knowledge of citizens' right and responsibilities.
- To promote students' participation in the local community.
- To promote students' critical and independent thinking.
- To promote students participation in school life.

Civic education is a process of creating awareness and provision of information and learning experiences to equip and empower citizen to participate positively in the democratic processes of their community, country and the outside world (Bayeh, 2016). This indicates the immeasurable role civic education can play in the democratization process of a given country by actively involving citizens in the political affairs at different levels of their country, and even beyond. Civic education creates a favourable environment for learners to co-exist with other socio-cultural groups and have a culture of respect for another's view (Gosa & Desta, 2014). It is only when people live together in unity that they can work in a

democratic way. This promotes popular participation which is a strong foundation of democracy.

Civic education teaches tolerance for people's culture, religion, linguistic, ethnic and racial differences. Tolerance, according to Bayeh (2016), is an essential element of democracy and civic disposition expected from a virtuous citizens. Tesfaye, Bahi and Kleinknecht (2013) asserted that the existing civic education curriculum has contributed to introduce youths to the values of democracy and human rights which has never existed in the country's modern history. Bayeh (2016) averred that this shows that the subject is playing a role in informing citizens of the worth of having good quality governance in contrast to the pervious undemocratic tradition.

Problems faced by civic Education

Despite the contributions of civic education in building and creating good behaved citizens who are active and participatory in the affairs of the societies, it still faces a lot of challenges which have limited the effective and adequate realization of its purposes at primary, secondary and tertiary levels of the Nigerian education system. Some of these problems are highlighted as follows in order to attract attention of both government and citizens to seek their solutions for sustainable democratic governance:

1. **Content and context-related problem:** The contents of civic education have some deformity. The subject places great emphasis on the domestic legal frameworks (Baye, 2016). In this vein, Tesfaye et al (2013) observed

that the lessons devote much time to inform students about the constitution, laws of the land and policies of the government while international laws and issues generally receive very limited time. This demonstrates that the subject is dedicated, a great deal, to inculcating into students' mind the government's ideology, programme and policies and thereby lacks an international context.

2. **Lack of civil societies' engagement:** Educating Civic and Ethical Education by government alone will not be sufficient to create good citizens equipped with ethical values and democratic culture, instead, it should also be corroborated by the teachings of other stakeholders such as the family, religious institutions, civil society organizations, the media and other institutions (Mulugeta, 2015). In this regard, the role of civil societies will not be underestimated in line with the position of European Union (2011) that the role of civil societies in promoting good governance by engaging in Civic Education activities is well-known across the world.

3. **Lack of democratic school administration:** It is not uncommon to find an authoritarian tendency in Nigerian schools administration. School principals are stakeholders of the implementation of Civic Education curriculum. As bedrock of implementing Civic Education, they should exhibit democratic activities and behaviour since they play a great role in shaping student's behaviour in a negative or positive way. In line with this view, Al-Hedhiri (n.d) interestingly explained the adverse effect of an undemocratic school administration on the students' character-building as achieving these civic education goals requires a democratic, participatory school climate and a

student-centered learning environment. Teaching democratic principles to students living with authoritarian structures and cultures at school is not effective. Indeed, it is counterproductive. Students see the glaring contrast between what they read in the textbooks and what they experience in class and outside school.

Conclusively, it is hard to achieve the objectives of Civic Education in the schools that are dominated by a culture that does not promote dialogue, tolerance acceptance of and respect for differences, freedom of opinion and expression, equality, cooperation or social responsibility.

4. **Improper mode of delivery:** Improper mode of delivery of Civic and Ethical Education is hampering the effort of building good behaviour and creating active and participating citizens who can play a role in the democratization process of the country (Baye, 2016). In regards to this, Tesfaye et al, (2013) had averred that using plasma as a method of delivery is affecting learners from acquiring the required knowledge and skill from the subject. This problem is prevalent at the primary and secondary school levels where plasma is being employed. It is clear that the method does not appropriately fit the very nature of the subject because it involves frequent repetition, interactive and participatory (Browne, 2013). Browne continued that participatory and interactive methods such as role playing, problem-solving activities and mock political or judicial activities are best received and appear to deliver better and long-term results. The fact that plasma

education is too fast, beamed only once, highly dependent on an uninterrupted flow of electric power, and in English with no local language support (Tekeste, 2006) compromises the goal of education at large, let alone Civic and Ethical Education, which is interactive in nature. Thus, allowing students to enjoy, face to-face interaction with their teachers will enable them to internalize democratic ethical values and to exercise them in a classroom.

5. **External environment:** The behaviour of students is not formed exclusively from within a school. The influence of their peers, neighbours, families and society as a whole plays significant role. Peers are important socialization agents that greatly determine the decisions, attitudes and behaviours of students (Korir, et al, 2014). Students whose friends involve in harmful activities such as in-take of drugs and truancy are likely to have a lower academic performance. Though students are taught the good trace of a citizen such as tolerance, honesty, civic mindedness and compassion, their relationship with corrupted persons like smokers and drug addicts is affecting the traits they have learnt. Therefore, the whole external environment needs to be enabling in order to realize the goals of Civic Education more effectively.

6. Weak democracy: according to UNDP, (Baye, 2016) made it clear that the paramount role should be played by the government for Civic Education to meet its goals. Baye stated that it is important that government is seen not just as one of a number of potential partners but as the pivotal actor, the

disposition of which will have a major impact on the ability of Civic Education programmes to function and produce results. The author also opined that government should make sure that necessary rights of assembly, expression, association and others are recognized and protected; active interests from a variety of stakeholders, particularly civil society, are duly considered and that resources to enable longer-term Civic Education initiatives to be undertaken should be provided. These conditions of Civic Education are better satisfied in a state having a democratic government. For citizens to be practically involved in the process of democracy of their country based on the knowledge they possess, the political environment should be participatory in the sense of allowing different stakeholders take part in political and decision making. This is not the case in Nigeria. Therefore, Civic Education will continue to play a limited role in national development and cohesion.

7. **Lack of role model teachers:** The quality of teachers is important and has been globally accepted to be significantly associated with quality of education in general and students' learning outcomes in particular. Thus, to transmit better knowledge and help to develop students' understanding, attitudes, skills, learning and core values, teachers should have the competence in themselves as role models for their students who consciously or subconsciously learn their behaviour. However, it is common to see unmotivated Nigerian teachers with low morale due to poor salaries, low respect for and status of teachers and, poor school management and

leadership. This negatively affects the proper role that teachers should play in delivering quality education and building good character in future adults for national development and cohesion.

Conclusion

It is undeniable fact that democratic governance is a crucial element for national development and cohesion. Civic education can help in building the good behaviour of citizens by educating and inculcating the need for co-existence and tolerance among others in them, to ensure sustainable national cohesion which will promote democratic governance and national development. Thus, civic education contributes in creating active citizens who are aware of their rights and their duties, the duties of the government and the overall political life of their country. This for urgent actions by all stakeholders in education to support and create better modes of delivering civic education in Nigeria schools and as well as the society monitor and evaluate its effectiveness towards national development and cohesion.

Recommendations

Based on the highlighted problems facing civic education in Nigerian schools, the following recommendations were made.

1. Government should make civic education a compulsory subject/course from primary to higher institutions in order to instill the required values and civic responsibilities in the students.
2. Peoples' upbringing mostly affect their behaviour and life style. Therefore, leaders, politicians, teachers, parents should live and lead by positive examples.

3. Government should organize and sponsor radio and television programmes that will emphasize peace education where children and adults will be helped to understand and have respect for the values and rights of other citizens within and outside their environments.
4. Curriculum planners should ensure that the modes of delivering civic education in schools include a single subject, taught through other subjects such as history and geography, integrated across all subjects and as an extra-curricular activity.
5. Teachers should exhibit good behaviour for their students as role models students.
6. There should be serious commitment from all stakeholders of civic education especially teachers, school administrators/principals and the government.

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