

Citizenship Education: A Key to Sustainable Democratic Structures in Nigeria

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Abstract

A nation with most of its citizens lacking in participatory skills with poor social values will have citizens' actions hindering the flourishing and sustenance of democratic structures. This paper aimed at examining the effectiveness of citizenship education, highlighting how the younger generations are being prepared for democracy in Nigeria. No doubt, Nigeria is at the verge of total collapse, the economy is in shambles and the political atmosphere is violently charged. Arson and murder, dishonesty, rape, armed robbery, violent communal clashes, bribery and corruption, banditry, kidnapping and many other social vices are fast becoming the features of Nigerian life. Nobody seems to be safe in the country due to the activities of the misguided youths who are fast taking delight in destruction instead of reconstruction. This situation results from the unfortunate loss of Nigerian traditional values, norms and good morals which ensured a stable, disciplined and self-reliant society in the past. The hope of this nation is the education for every citizen to play his role, discharge his responsibilities, know his rights, understand his country's constitution, the politics, the ethics, the religious, the economic and the ideas that make the nation a unique geo-political entity.

Keywords: democracy, citizenship, education, values, government

Introduction

Low turnout during elections reflects a rapid breakdown of peace and order, failing leadership, and passive followership, all of which speak to insufficient support for the democratic structures that would sustain democracy in Nigeria. At all levels of administration in Nigeria, there are impediments to a healthy democracy. Conflict, sparked by political rivalries, communal, ethnic, religious, or resource allocation rivalries, and a lack of sufficient citizenship and civic training, is a major danger to democracy and national unity (USAID, 2019).

Many government entities lack the capacity to carry out their mandate and do not engage citizens or the private sector effectively. Furthermore, civil society lacks the capacity and resources to interact with government and push for change successfully. In Nigeria, establishing strong democratic systems has proven a difficult undertaking. The continued support of democratic institutions is under threat due to a lack of faith in the legal system, electoral procedures, and the media, which should serve as a source of hope for the ordinary citizen. Conflict of many forms, ranging from political, communal, religious, economic, and social crises, pervades the Nigerian society, according to Ayodele (2012). Terrorism, banditry, corruption, rape, alcohol and drug misuse, gangsters' activities, government agents' abuse, and a lack of adequate organization by the youth to stir up reforms for democratic norms in Nigeria are only a few of the topics of concern. This also raises concerns about how Nigeria as a nation is purposefully preparing future generations to participate actively and meaningfully in the democratic process (USAID, 2019).

Similarly, it is not enough for students to be stressed in passive memorization of facts and figures of information in democracy; rather, students should be actively prepared in democratic-related activities to ensure their future engagement in public life. This article looks at the effectiveness of citizenship education in terms of increasing students' capacity and social skills to make demands and contribute meaningfully to the country's democratic institutions in the hopes of creating long-term democratic structures. According to the NCSS (2013), character education is required to develop the academic capacity that will allow democracy to work in children. This can be accomplished by providing individuals with proper citizenship education, a topic rich in the fundamental tenets required for long-term democratic structure and development. According to Pahel, as referenced in Adebayo, Olatunde, and Adeduntan (2020), the greatest approach to raise responsible citizens is to instill democratic values in the youth through civic education. Huber and Harkavy (2007) correctly said that four key conditions are required for a country's democracy to take root: a reasonable literacy rate, a lack of extreme poverty, security and peace, and cultural perceptions conducive to basic democratic principles. When all, or at least the majority, of a society's members believe they have a stake in the decisions made, and consequently work to implement those decisions, the community becomes a sustainable democratic society (Fatma & Huseyin, 2019). This article looks at the effectiveness of citizenship education to evaluate how young people in Nigeria are being prepared to construct long-term democratic systems.

Concept of citizenship education

It is important to define who a citizen is before delving into the definition of citizenship education. The term citizen, according to Akinlaye (2012), refers to a person's membership in a country or nation state. He went on to say that citizenship is a relationship between an individual and a state or nation that entails the individual's full political membership in the state as well as his unconditional allegiance to it. As a result, in order to maintain, nurture, and sustain his status as a citizen, a citizen has functions, rights, and responsibilities. A citizen also enjoys privileges that a non-citizen can only partake in to a limited extent, if at all. Citizenship is the official recognition of an individual's

integration into the nation's political system. As a result, citizenship is defined by a more or less permanent allegiance to the nation-state. Even if a citizen leaves the country's territory by immigrating to another country, he is still bound by this tie unless he has lost his citizenship status in that country.

In a similar vein, the nation-state bears specific responsibilities for the welfare of its citizens' property, living standards, and quality of life. According to Bolarin (2012), these responsibilities are also permanent, and citizens can normally rely on them for their livelihood. A citizen is a person who is a member of the state and has social and political rights, according to Edinyang and Yusuf (2021). They went on to say that in Nigeria, a twenty-one-year-old adult has equal access to education, property, and housing regardless of race or creed. Citizenship education, according to Mark (2013), is "the totality of learning instruction which a citizen needs to play his role discharge his responsibilities, know his rights, and understand his country - the constitution, the politics, the ethnics, the religions, the economics, and the ideas that make the nation a unique geopolitical entity." Citizenship education, according to Akinlaye (2012), consists of formal and informal methods through which citizens are educated to understand and contribute to the society's effective and smooth functioning. To achieve this important goal, all nation's schools attempt to develop all young learners with the necessary knowledge, skills, understanding, experience, ideals, and values that will lead them to fulfilling competent roles as citizens of the nation-state through appropriate curriculum. Citizenship education, according to Olaniyonu (2012), entails the fulfillment of a citizen's functions in a society, or the societal roles required of citizens, which also necessitate involvement. Individuals in society must acquire suitable and relevant knowledge, experience, attitudes, values, and skills of rational decision-making and social action in order to be successful and effective participants, he noted. The advancement of the society's nationalistic and patriotic goals is at the heart of this style of education. Citizenship education has thus evolved to encompass more than just the teaching of facts about the political structure and operations, as well as the memorization of government officials' names. It is the promotion of good citizenship in its broadest definition. It has been regarded as one of the major all-pervasive educational objectives since the time of Plato. In this case, the schools were set up to bear a particularly severe burden in this regard. The schools are supposed to teach pupils how to comprehend and believe in the democratic process as a living, evolving process rather than a collection of inflexible principles that must be memorized without challenge.

Education in the art of citizenship, on the other hand, is anticipated to take place outside of the classroom. Of course, the church and the home/family play an equal role in shaping basic opinions and understandings of all citizens' roles in society. Furthermore, the informal educational impacts of radio, television, and newspapers have an equal impact on a person's fundamental attitudes and disposition toward civil affairs. Election campaigns and other political events provide a tangible source of knowledge, particularly the extensively advertised content for national, state, and local seats. Citizenship education is to prepare teenagers for social responsibility, which will aid in solving the nation's growing difficulties. It instills in young people the values of patriotism and

nationalism. Furthermore, according to Smith (2010), citizenship education instills in youths the belief that they can become better future leaders by teaching them civic responsibilities, which include active participation in the development of democracy, decision-making and evaluative skills, learning public policy, and teaching them the value of service.

Citizenship education has risen to prominence as a cure for the world's issues. Citizenship education informs teenagers and citizens in general about their essential rights and how to exercise them effectively without being subjected to political or social hardship. Citizens' rights release them from political or societal oppression, paving the way for their well-being in a country. Citizenship education, according to Agun (2014), broadens citizens' awareness of how they can contribute to the progress and development of the society, state, or nation to which they belong. He went on to say that it improves citizens' lives by educating them about the benefits they will receive if they contribute significantly to the state's democratic process. Citizenship education has long been regarded as a significant tool for enhancing and maintaining a country's democracy for large-scale democratic advantages. It is one of the foundations upon which a healthy democracy should be built. Citizenship education helps citizens learn more about the constitution and the laws that govern a state so that they can follow the rules and become law-abiding citizens. Furthermore, according to UNESCO (2019), citizenship education strives to develop decent citizens and qualified individuals who are aware of political issues in their country and around the world, respect others, embrace equality for all, prioritize peace, and combat all types of discrimination.

Concept of Democracy

Democracy is a system of governance based on the representation of the people. It is viewed as a people's government, founded by and for the people and backed by constitutional sovereignty. Democracy, according to Asua and Udofia (2016), is a government that allows residents to engage in political decision-making and elect representatives to govern them for a set period of time. Democracy, as a form of government, assumes that every person has the right to a set of fundamental liberties and opportunities, including the ability to participate in democratic government and hold public office. Democracy, according to Ogbe and Ojie (2020), is a system of government that entails the transfer of people's sovereign power to elected officials in order to create a government and made legitimate the constituted government's exercise of governmental control over the people. As a result, when Duru (2002) defined democracy as a political system in which the eligible people actively engage in setting the policy direction of government, he was looking at it from a theoretical standpoint. In essence, this process can be achieved through forming political parties, holding free and fair elections on a regular basis, and increasing political awareness. According to Okeke (2014), democracy is built on the concepts of consent and political equality, and it is defined as a political system in which governments are formed by a majority of votes cast in regular, non-coerced elections. Democracy is defined as the right to be represented in government, to occupy public office, to vote, and to be voted for.

However, one of democracy's foundational assumptions is that it should ensure citizens' well-being (Okeke, 2014). Based on the foregoing, the question that arises is: is the wellbeing of Nigerian citizens guaranteed under democratic governance as it currently exists in Nigeria? When Ojake and Allen (2009) noticed in their study that democracy in Nigeria neglects the wellbeing of its inhabitants, they gave validity to the question. Citizens can only learn what democratic behaviour is, understand their rights and freedoms in relation to others, understand the importance of fulfilling their individual and social responsibilities, and embrace a democratic culture in social life through a planned and coordinated citizenship education. As a result, democracy can grow as a result of strong, supportive institutions, laws, and a pervasive democratic culture, which includes democratic principles, knowledge, and action, ethical judgements, and analytical ability and skills (Huber & Harkavy, 2007). According to Lenz, as stated by Fatma and Huseyin (2019), one of the most crucial requirements of democracy is citizens developing a sense of their personal dignity and autonomy, as well as mutual respect and acceptance. The problem of democracy in Nigeria revolves around how to forge a development process that is simultaneously participatory for individual citizens, sensitive to, and protective of individual rights, freedoms, and liberty; accommodative of multiple and competitive loyalties; and generative of economic growth and distributive justice, as observed by Ogovbair (1992:10) cited in Erunke and Uchem (2009).

Sustainable democracy

Sustainable democracy is a logical process of altering individuals' attitudes, behaviours, and orientations through good citizenship education, which has a positive impact on democracy in a society. Sustainable democracy, according to Ogo and Ojie (2020), is defined as an act of safeguarding and promoting people's electoral rights, democratic culture, and ideals in a society. They went on to define it as the process of developing all components of democracy and a healthy democratic environment for the benefit of current and future generations. In essence, sustainable democracy entails a thoughtful resolution on how to address the root cause(s) of anti-democratic behaviour among citizens by collaborating citizenship education for the teaching and enlightenment of citizens on democratic culture and values in order to keep and maintain a healthy democratic practice in a society. In Nigeria, it is clear that a lack of consistent democratic education has led to many Nigerians becoming electorally illiterate and politically indifferent, allowing Nigerian politicians to engage in electoral fraud before, during, and after elections. This anti-democratic circumstance threatens Nigeria's ability to create a long-term democratic system. Apart from poverty and corruption, political indifference and a lack of understanding of the voting process have created openings for politicians to control the electoral process, as stated by Ogo and Ojie (2020).

Nevertheless, a good citizen is open and thoughtful to the injustices of human conditions in the society. Such citizen works to correct unacceptable situations in the community through social activity. The citizen is constantly attracted to learning and understanding the nation's social structures and processes. He is concerned about the nation's natural resources and appreciates unpretentious differences of opinion. Being a member of

society implies political commitment and it entails that a citizen assumes responsibility for the consequences of government's acts. Furthermore, Akinlaye (2012) stated that citizens must be involved in the nation's governance. It loses its meaning if citizens refuse to vote, refuse to bear responsibility for the actions of government, and think of politics in terms of "we" who are governed and "they" who govern.

From 1999 to 2019, Nigerian elections were marked by a slew of electoral irregularities, including fraud, violence, political thuggery, ballot box snatching, vote buying, and voter intimidation by law enforcement forces tasked with safeguarding the electorates during elections. This is thought to be harmful to consolidation of democracy since Nigeria's perilous status poses a serious threat to the country's long-term democracy. The development of a profound democratic culture among citizens through citizenship education, which is loaded with essential societal values needed to construct robust democracy, is the only way to ensure a long-term democratic framework (Unimna & Wali, 2019). According to Agun (2014), in order to achieve long-term democracy in Nigeria, it should be recognized that democracy is more than just elections and voting. The fact that a country elects its leaders through the ballot box does not always imply democracy. Any democracy can be nurtured and sustained if certain tenets are followed (Agun, 2014). These include:

- The people's sovereignty
- Minority rights and majority rule
- Social advancement
- Good governance and the rule of law
- Civil and political rights are respected
- Increased literacy
- Press freedom
- Judicial independence

Nigerian democratic structures that promote democracy

Democratic structure is a form of government in which institutions, both internally and in their interactions with other institutions, operate according to democratic processes and principles (Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2021). Democratic structures, according to Lay (2019), are institutions that facilitate and promote democratic activities. They are the institutions that ensure that democracy runs smoothly. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Political Parties, and Pressure Groups are among the institutions mentioned by the author. Some of these institutions are described and analyzed here.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)

INEC is a corporate body charged with the job of organizing, conducting, and supervising elections into elective political posts in Nigeria, according to Lay (2019). Joseph (2021), in a similar vein, stated that INEC's actions are governed by the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, as amended, and the Electoral Act of 2006 as amended. The

commission is made up of a chairman and 12 commissioners, all of whom are chosen by the President with the agreement of the national assembly's joint house.

Functions of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)

Akinlaye (2012) summarized the functions of INEC as follows:

- i. They conduct elections
- ii. Voters registration
- iii. Registration of political parties, monitor the organization and operation of political parties and campaign.
- iv. Provision of electoral officers and election materials
- v. Provision of security at the polling stations
- vi. Education of the electorates

Political parties

Another important institution and/or democratic structure that promotes democracy in Nigeria is the political parties. Smith (2010) maintained that these are organized group of individuals who share political ideologies, beliefs and interests and who are seeking to win and control power and machinery of government. Political parties serve as a forum for national unity and mutual understanding. This is possible because it brings together people from different ethnic and religious groups.

Functions of political parties

Smith (2010) enumerated functions of political parties as follows:

- I. It serves as machinery for recruitment/appointment of office holders
- II. It serves as a link between the government and the people
- III. It ensures political stability in government and allows for harmonization of sectional and diverse interest.
- IV. Provision of social amenities and infrastructure.
- V. It also helps to sensitize the electorates on crucial national issues, governmental policies and programmes.
- VI. It ensures that the party in power is accountable to the electorates through constructive criticism.

Pressure group

Imogie (2009) opined that pressure group is an organized body of people seeking to influence government policies, in order to promote the interest of their members. Pressure groups are also called interest group. The functions of the pressure group, according to Imogie (2009), include:

- i. Offering of useful pieces of advice and suggestions.
- ii. Helps to promote economic stability and general welfare of the public.
- iii. Pressure group educates members and the public on national issues and fundamental human rights.
- iv. They serve as a link between the people and government and act as watchdog over public policies.

v. They support candidates and political parties to win election and act as manpower bank from where government can draw experts.

Citizenship education in Nigeria: Its democratic importance

Citizens play an important part in the democratic, social, economic, political, and developmental processes of the state or nation in a politically structured human society known as the state. A citizen is a recognized member of society, state, or nation, and as such, he or she has the power to actively participate in the state's or nation's democratic process for good governance. Citizenship education and democracy cannot be separated, according to Imogie (2009), because:

1. It increases human development: Citizenship education enhances human development by teaching healthy morals, values, and attitudes in order to be a good citizen of a state.

2. It promotes political socialization: Citizenship education helps citizens shape their minds about who they are and how they should behave in the political and economic institutions in which they live by instilling values that help shape their minds. Citizenship education promotes political socialization by influencing youths' and citizens' political values and views, as well as their political knowledge, identity, efficacy, and engagement in national affairs.

3. It promotes political stability: Citizenship education teaches citizens about the society's political rules and ideals, as well as the importance of avoiding political indifference. The knowledge they gain from the exposition helps them develop appropriate political orientations, patriotic attitudes, and national consciousness, all of which are necessary for political stability.

4. It also raises awareness, assisting citizens in the development of democratic principles such as freedom of expression, adherence to the law, justice, liberty, and respect for constituted authority, all of which contribute to political stability. Furthermore, the interdependence of strong leadership and followership maintains political stability, and citizenship education raises awareness on this. Citizenship education will go a long way toward alleviating the problem of bad governance and promoting good government.

5. It fosters national development: National development is defined as long-term economic growth in which resources are used to meet human needs while simultaneously protecting the environment, ensuring that these requirements are met not only now, but also in the future. It also supports national development by instilling in students the spirit of nationalism, patriotism, fundamental human rights and responsibilities, understanding of the national constitution, and how these factors contribute to national development.

Methods for improving and maintaining Nigerian democracy

There are numerous ways for Nigeria to maintain and strengthen its democratic framework in order to create a strong and cohesive society. According to Athanasius (2017), these methods include the following:

1. Respect for the rule of law: In any democratic context, the concept of respecting the law of the land, or having respect for the rule of law, is critical. Nigerian political

leaders and citizens must insist on and push for respect for the rule of law if Nigerian democracy is to progress.

2. Promoting patriotism: Nigerian democracy has been endangered by unpatriotic attitudes demonstrated by Nigerian political figures, notably political elites. The leaders, whom Nigerians have entrusted with authority and who are expected to lead wisely, have failed Nigerians; thus, in order to improve Nigerian democracy, Nigerian political leaders must apply democratic ideals in Nigeria and become loyal citizens of the country.

3. Respect for human rights: Because democracy is seen as the finest form of governance, allowing for freedom of speech and respect for human rights, among other democratic principles should be upheld. Respect for human rights is one of the most effective strategies to help Nigerian democracy to improve.

4. Encouraging sincerity of purpose in government: One of the most effective strategies to improve Nigerian democracy is to encourage sincerity of purpose in governance. Practical and realistic measures should be implemented to address socioeconomic injustice, electoral malpractices and irregularities, and corruption, to name a few of Nigeria's challenges.

5. Promoting cooperation and dialogue among arms of government: To improve Nigerian democracy, there is a need for dialogue, cooperation, and continued engagement among the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches of government. This cooperation will enhance and sustain democracy, allowing Nigerians to reap the full benefits of democratic governance.

6. Upholding democratic values: It is especially important to uphold democratic principles in Nigeria if democracy is to improve. There should be a deliberate effort on the part of all Nigerians, particularly those in positions of leadership who are responsible for establishing and implementing government programmes, to defend democratic norms.

7. Nigerian political leaders should do their best to improve democracy: In order to improve democracy in Nigeria, political leaders must do their best. Nigerian leaders must learn to be courageous in handling state affairs, which is especially important now that there is a push to restructure the country.

Conclusion

Based on the discussion thus far, it has been established that effective citizenship education is a significant challenge in Nigeria, where traditional values are being lost, undemocratic civilian administration is in place, abject poverty, oppression of the poor by the rich, the rule of law is absent and courts are completely ignored, there is a high rate of corruption, and all forms of indiscipline are rampant. However, with proper citizenship education, the majority of these issues would be resolved in no time. Citizenship education's objectives are very closely related to and relevant to these issues, resulting in a deep sense of awareness of citizens' fundamental human rights, exposure of students to knowledge of the Nigerian constitution and its provisions and operations, provision of essential knowledge on democracy, sensitization of the people to government's role as well as citizens' obligations, duties, and enhancement of human development.

Recommendations

Based on the discussion in this paper on the effectiveness of citizenship education as a key to sustainable democratic structures in Nigeria, it is recommended that, because citizenship education is education for citizens, it should be made a core and compulsory subject in pre-primary, primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions in Nigeria, taking into account the role of the subject matter, its contributions to national development, and many other factors. Also, the government should encourage citizenship educators to enlighten Nigerians in both private and public sectors through seminars and workshops, on the roles of citizens in national development.

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