

Role of Social Studies Education towards Meeting Democratic Leadership Challenges in Nigeria: Implications for Nation Building

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Abstract

Nigeria as a democratic nation has been plagued over the years with enormous democratic leadership challenges which have undermined her attempt at nation building. These challenges range from tribalism, nepotism, lack of authentic voters' register, ethno-religious conflict, economic and political instability among others. A theoretical method was adopted in this paper, in which concepts like democracy, social studies, and nation building were extensively explicated. The paper examined the roles of social studies education geared towards meeting the democratic leadership challenges of Nigeria. The paper equally emphasized that for there to be a successful nation building in all ramifications, these challenges must be dealt with by using social studies as a tool. It is recommended among others that Social Studies and Civic Educators Association of Nigeria (SOSCEAN) and Social Studies Association of Nigeria (SOSAN) should form a synergy under one umbrella in order to formulate appropriate plan for proper implementation of Social Studies Curriculum in all Nigerian schools.

Keyword: democracy, social, studies, nation, building, leadership.

Introduction

The concepts of democracy, social studies and nation building are conceptually explicated as it relates to this paper.

Democracy

The concept of democracy has no consensus definition as it has severally been defined by different scholars based on their perception of the term. But for the purpose of this paper, some definitions will be looked into. Democracy is conceptualized to mean freedom and the right to choose. Suffice it to say that the term connotes a general participation of the populace in governance through elected representatives. Duru (2002) viewed democracy from a theoretical perspective when he defined the concept as a political system in which

the eligible people participate actively in shaping the policy direction of government. This process is achievable through the formation of political parties, periodic free and fair elections and political awareness creation. Ideally, democracy can also be conceptualized to mean a government in which the ultimate power is held by the people and can be exercised directly or indirectly by them through a process of representation often involving held free and fair elections. The above definition indicates that all individuals in the concerned society are socially equal before the law and equally have the constitutional right to vote and be voted for in an election.

Democracy in the words of Yusuf (2017) is viewed as “a government by the people, either directly or through representatives, in which the government is limited by the rule of law, equality among citizens, sovereignty of the people, free choice of rulers, frequent and regular elections, and independence of the judiciary, separation of power, checks and balances and protection of human rights”. Schumpeter, as mentioned in Ayeni (2017), conceptualizes democracy as “an institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the peoples’ “ vote”. Dahl as cited in Ayeni (2017) shares the same view with Schumpeter when he contended that: democracy presupposes a high level of civil liberties, political pluralism - extensive competition by contestants, and political participation that provides the choice for the electorate to select candidates in free and fair elections. In like manner, Asua and Udofia (2016) see democracy as a government that allows the citizens to participate in political decision-making as well as to elect their representatives to govern them for a specified period of time. From the above definitions, the key feature of a democracy is the continuing responsiveness of government to the preferences of its citizens as political equals. Adie et al. (2022) noted that 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.

The advanced learner’s dictionary further sees democracy as a form of government that encourages and allows the rights of citizens such as freedom of speech, religion, opinion and association, the assertion of the rule of law, majority rule accompanied by respects for the rights of minorities. In democracy the voice of the people is important, because majority choose their leaders and determine the policy of their country through the elected representatives. However, a democratic system of government, according to Egharevba and Chiazor (2013:18), possibly ensures that “the government in power is accountable to the people and that such a regime and its personnel obey the laws of the land.” Fan (2014) further posits that in an ideal situation, democracy becomes associated with the doctrine of popular sovereignty, human rights, freedom of speech and expression, people’s participation, universal suffrage and so on. Ideally, democracy can further be viewed as a way through which the electorate (people) choose their leaders through election and equally hold their leaders accountable for their policies and their conduct in office. This therefore implies that for the people to actively choose those who will represent them without much interference, the democratic leadership process must be built on popular

participation which is achievable through awareness creation and political education. In addition, democracy can simply be looked at as an ideology of governance which sets an exceptional standard on the basic freedom and fundamental human rights of the governed citizens, the rule of law, the right to life and property, free flow of information and government criticism, as well as the right to choose between alternative political and religious positions. Interestingly, good governance is the hallmark of any democratic leadership structure which is anchored on transparency, accountability, internal controls, shared responsibility and participation, active representation, as well as fiduciary obligations and consultation.

Democracy, as viewed by Ayatse et al. (2013), is the system of government that is rooted in the notion that ultimate authority in governance rightly belongs to the people, and that everyone is entitled to an equitable participation and share in human rights, where equitable social and economic gains are the birthright of everyone in the society. Consequently, democracy has been described as government of the people, by the people and for the people. Here the law which is supreme in any democratic setting enables the leaders and the governed alike to be subject to it. Democracy as a theory sets some principles in place such as freedom, equity, justice, liberty, accountability and transparency through which the government must be run. Similarly, effective democratic structures rely on citizens' political participation, public opinion, accountability, integrity, and transparency. Interestingly, Babawale (2003) contended that democracy is superior to other forms of government because of the presumption that its attributes are facilitative of "good governance", the exercise of political power to promote the public good or welfare of the people. Simply put, democracy improves the wellbeing of the people, making it the best form of government through which a society's nation building can thrive on.

The basic characteristics of democracy include the existence of the mechanism for political and economic choice, balanced political structure and stable political system where periodic elections are held in which the people renew the mandate of those they love and accept or terminate those they are dissatisfied with through the succession of a new government (Ayatse et al, 2013). To this end, democracy gives the people the ability to determine who represents them through free and fair elections and equally holds them accountable for their conduct throughout their stay in office. In a nutshell, elections as a way of choosing the people's representatives are not only conducted to establish the legitimacy of the leaders through a regular contest, but also to provide a fertile ground for democracy to thrive, thereby enhancing nation building process. UNDP in its report, Governance for Sustainable Human Development as cited by Lanre (2012) identified the following as main characteristics of democratic governance (leadership): participation; rule of law; transparency; responsiveness; consensus orientation; equity; effectiveness and efficiency; accountability as well as strategic vision. Sequel to the aforementioned characteristics of good democratic governance, one can deduce that Nigeria as a democratic nation is clearly deficient in good democratic leadership which has hampered her nation building attempt. In addition, Umaru et al. (2014) noted that Nigerian leaders

and the elite must rise above corruption; they must obey the laws of the land; they must have consideration for their fellow Nigerians; they must be democratic at heart; they must be selfless, honest and committed to better serve the interest of the country at large; and they must be truly patriotic. Practicing the aforementioned would usher in a robust and dynamic society, helping to maintain, preserve and sustain the country's democratic structures.

Despite all social and economic policies that have been implemented by successive administrations, Nigeria has remained a laggard in social, economic and political developments. Political instability, abject poverty, acute youth unemployment, heightened crime rate, poor health prospects, widespread malnourishment have been the main features of Nigeria's political economy (Adagbabiri & Okolie, 2019). Unfortunately, Nigerians over the years have seen a significant number of unproductive governments with various leaders betraying the trust of the people who elected them to represent them. It is disheartening to note that Nigerians have not in the actual fact been able to determine how they are governed and/or how accountable their leaders are to them. Similarly, Adagbabiri and Okolie (2019) maintained that the current democratic governance in Nigeria has continued to witness repeated abuses of state power that have manifested in different forms and guises. According to them, the political elites still see policies or state power as an avenue for primitive accumulation of wealth. Thus, for democracy to thrive in any given society, the citizens, through social studies, must be well educated and equipped by inculcating into them the right knowledge, values, attitudes and skills to live a free and democratic life in the society which is germane for nation building.

Social Studies

In all these as earlier stated, social studies plays a very crucial role in helping to curtail the democratic leadership challenges bedevilling Nigeria as a country. Social Studies as a course of study is a value-laden discipline as it covers a variety of subjects such as anthropology, history, geography, economics, political science and sociology. Beside the wide coverage of the subject, its content is centred on human interactions. The above assertion is in line with Fan (2003) who posits that most of the life's decisions one may take as an individual have to do with events of the past (history), physical objects (geography), cultural objects (sociology/anthropology), political struggle (political science), satisfaction of unlimited wants and needs with limited resources (economics) as well as values (sociology). It is equally defined in the words of Edinyang et al. (2013) as the course of instruction which equips the learner with cognition, values, attitudes and functional skills to survive in an ever dynamic society. Edinyang and Effiom (2014) further defined Social Studies as the study of humanity, interactions of humans for peaceful co-existence, interdependence and inter-relationships for effective living in the society. Unimna and Ohanyere (2018) added that social studies is a subject that primarily concerns itself with the study of man, his immediate environments as well as the society where he lives and the outcome of the interactions between these three elements. Mezieobi as cited in Unimna and Ohanyere (2018) viewed social studies as a reformatory school

instruction designed to equip learners with desirable attitudes, values, skills and knowledge for cohesive social existence in the Nigerian society.

By extension, social studies in the words of Bariham cited in Edinyang et al. (2014) is defined as a subject in the school curriculum that equips the child with relevant knowledge, skills as well as the desirable attitudes and values required in solving personal and societal problems. This in essence implies that social studies exposes the learners to the contemporary problems of human survival and at the same time equipping them with necessary knowledge and skills needed in resolving such challenges. Ajayi as cited in Unimna (2018) contends that social studies can be used to achieve a reformed society, especially in the areas of social regeneration, political integration and cultural adaptation among Nigerians. Social studies through its value-laden contents impart on the learners collective responsibility anchored on good governance which is the hallmark of democratic leadership garnished with effective loyalty by the people. Iwegbu as mentioned in Edinyang (2016) opined that social studies employs the use of concepts such as empathy, honesty, tolerance, rationality, respect for persons' needs and interest, decision-making, interaction, independence, morality, cooperation, obedience, adaptation, loyalty, patriotism, authority, values, critical thinking, progress and rule of law, for effective living in a democratic society. A thorough look at the above concepts makes social studies a worthwhile course of instruction that has the wherewithal to refine, reform, refurbish, and reconstruct an individual learner who may possibly turn out to develop into a transformational democratic leader equipped with the anticipated intellectual prowess, skills and expertise that would change the unpleasant narrative of the current Nigerian democratic leadership failure.

It is on this premise that NCSS (1992), defined social studies as the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. To them, social studies helps the young people to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world. The focus on the young people here implies that they represent future democratic leaders whose decisions and or actions will make or mar the needed democratic leadership necessary for effective nation building in any given society. To this end, democracy brings about true representation with a well thought out action taken to tackle the political and socio-economic problems of the people without which, the society's efforts at building a dynamic, progressive, united and integrated nation could become a mere hallucinations, leading to disorderliness in the society.

Objectives of Social Studies

At whatever level of the Nigerian educational system, be it primary, secondary or higher institutions of learning where Social Studies is taught, there are some underlying objectives which Social Studies is expected to achieve. The general objectives of Social Studies as highlighted by Fan (2003) can be categorized as follows:-

1. Humanistic education - that is, helping the child to comprehend his life.
2. Citizenship education - that is, preparing the child for social responsibility.

3. Intellectual education - that is, introducing the child to the modes of thinking and inquiry of the social sciences.

4. Value education - that is, inculcating in the individual some societal expected behaviours and group activities, attitudes, values and feelings.

Other objectives found worthy of mentioning are as well enumerated below:

Social studies helps to develop in the learner the right attitudes, skills, values and knowledge required for active social life and political participation. The ultimate objective of social studies as noted by Mezieobi (2014) is the development of the character of man - inculcating in him worthy attitudes which will be habituated in actuality. This personality development of man, is the fulcrum upon which rapid transformation of the Nigerian society is anchored. The fundamental objective of social studies education in Nigeria, according to Iwegbu as mentioned in Edinyang (2016), is the desire to integrate the lingual, ethnic and religiously diverse people of Nigeria through creating a sense of national consciousness in the process of teaching and learning of social studies; hence inculcating the need for integration in the learner and discouraging an attitude that may cause disintegration in Nigeria. With these in mind, an individual learner of social studies is loaded with the desired ability, values, attitudes and skills to make a profound contribution geared towards democratic development of the Nigerian society.

Nation Building

For there to be an understanding of the concept of nation building, it is imperative to first of all define the term "nation". A nation is defined in the words of Chaturvedi as cited in Antigha (2015) as "a collection of people bound together by cultural factors, sharing values and traditions, a common language, religion, history and usually occupying the same geographical area". A cardinal point in the definition is that there is a common heritage bounding the people together. Looking at the above definition of a nation, the question that comes to mind is; what then is nation building? And how possible is it to build a nation? Nation building, according to Mylonas (2017), is the "the process of constructing or structuring a national identity using the power of the state by unifying people, so that political stability and socio-economic viability are ensured. To this end, Antigha (2015) posited that the primary aim of nation building is the unification of the people to foster stability, solidarity and viability.

Nigeria as a sovereign nation is a multi-nation state with numerous ethnic nationalities which has made it impossible to see Nigeria as a nation-state. The heterogeneous nature of Nigeria has hampered its attempt at building a one indivisible nation which calls for unity in diversity to thrive. This is simply so because, it is practically impossible to build a nation out of many nations. Consequently, the dilemma of building a nation from nations provides a very broad perspective in Social Studies curriculum, in terms of determining how to achieve unity, integration and stability in the face of disintegrating variables, being the multiplicity of culture, custom and traditions of diverse native people that make up Nigeria (Antigha, 2015).

According to Ibrahim (2008), nation building is about building a political entity which corresponds to a given territory, based on some generally accepted rules, norms, and principles, and a common citizenship. However, the author further asserts that nation-building is about building a common sense of purpose, a sense of shared destiny, a collective imagination of belonging. From the foregoing, nation-building is therefore about building the material and immaterial fibres that clench a political entity together in order to give it a sense of purpose. It is of a truth that Nigeria can equally succeed in building a nation from her heterogeneous nature to one indivisible entity by applying a collective consciousness that is achievable through the instrumentality of Social Studies.

Challenges of democratic leadership in Nigeria since 1999

Democratic leadership in Nigeria have not fared well over the years but has been plagued with enormous challenges ranging from nepotism, ethno-religious conflict, economic and political instability, and others. Democracy is anchored on the ability to respond to prevalent demands for cultural, social, economic and political reforms; an ability to incorporate popular sectors into the political process in any meaningful way. This is still absent in Nigerian democratic leadership. Nigeria as a pluralistic society faces a lot of challenges for effective democratic leadership. A few of these drawbacks is discussed below:

1. The greatest pitfall to Nigeria's true democratic practices is tribalism which has eaten deep into the fabrics of the Nigerian people. As the name implies, it is the behaviour and attitudes that emanate from strong allegiance to one's own tribe or social group with little or no attention given to other tribes or social groups. This obnoxious act has done more harm than good to the country's national integration and nation building attempt.

2. Secondly, Dike (2002) in his view on the problems bedevilling true democratic practices in Nigeria highlighted such problems like lack of authentic voter registration, ethnicity, illiteracy and ignorance, continued poverty reinforced by mass unemployment, discrimination, tribalism, absence of basic democratic values in Nigeria, corruption, among others.

3. The next is godfatherism. Democratic practices in the Nigerian terrain is built on godfatherism or simply put, "*who knows who,*" which in no small measure has produced visionless and unpatriotic leaders who in turn use state funds to service their greedy and heartless godfathers to the detriment of the masses. A good example is the case involving the former governor of Anambra State Dr Chris Ngige who was forcefully removed from office in 2003, simply because his godfather Chris Uba felt that he was no longer dancing to his tune.

4. Another serious issue bedevilling democratic leadership in Nigeria is mass poverty amongst the citizens. Based on UN report as quoted by Olanrewaju (2017), over 80 million Nigerians currently live below the poverty line. The report has it that by February 2018, Nigeria would have overtaken India as the country with the most people in extreme poverty. This makes the poor masses susceptible for the few rich to buy over during election; with alluring empty promises of bettering their lives after elections.

5. Ineffective electoral body. The incessant occurrences of vote buying, inconclusive, cancelled and overturned elections results in Nigeria lend credence to the

assertion that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is ominously ineffective in conducting free, fair and credible elections in Nigeria. The reality is that during elections in Nigeria, the ruling party tries as much as it could to win the election at all cost even when it is clear that the candidate fielded is not wanted by the people.

Solutions to democratic leadership challenges of Nigeria

For Nigeria to come out of the numerous challenges facing its democratic practices, all hands must be on deck starting with the citizens up to the leaders. The following are some of the solutions to the democratic leadership challenges in Nigeria:

- **Inculcation of right attitude**

Nigerian citizens from all tribes, be it Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo, Idoma, Tiv, Efik, Ijaw, Ibibio and so on must learn to live in harmony with one another. This is only possible with the inculcation of the right attitude through effective teaching and learning of social studies in all Nigerian schools.

- **Right orientation of Nigerian citizens**

Nigerian citizens ought to be given the right orientation on their roles and its importance to nation building during a democratic process. This is only possible through proper teaching and learning of social studies contents that have to do with citizenship education in all Nigerian schools.

- **Firm devotion to the rule of law**

Most of the difficulties concomitant with effective working of a constitutional democracy in Nigeria is anchored on the inability of the country's leadership to firmly adhere to the rule of law, which ultimately states that no one is above the law. The democratic leadership in Nigeria will thrive only on the basis that the leaders see every Nigerian citizen as equal before the law and try as much as they can to jettison impunity.

- **Political education and awareness creation**

Nigerian citizens should be properly educated on the importance of political participation through political education and awareness creation which will help to strengthen the democratic process.

- **Eradication of poverty**

In order to reduce the tendency of the youths being used as political thugs, the government should as a matter of importance reduce poverty to its barest minimum by creating job opportunities where the youths will channel their youthful energy into productive venture rather than masquerading themselves as political thugs.

- **Improvement of the effectiveness of INEC**

It is of necessity that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) be backed and supported with extra funding and law to enable it to carry out its assigned duties in a more effective way. Notwithstanding the fact that Nigeria as a democratic nation, still has a long way to go in democratic leadership development, however, all hope is not lost as the country is on the pathway to practising true democracy with the current amended Electoral Act 2022 as being signed into law by the president.

The role of Social Studies education in Nigerian democratic process

The role of social studies education in Nigerian democracy cannot be exaggerated. This is simply so because it helps to create in the learner the desired skills, attitudes, values and knowledge germane for nation building and national integration.

Sheshi (2002) noted that social studies contributes in making citizens understand the diversity among the people of Nigeria and further helps them to see the cooperation and inter-dependence among them which are the major elements of nation building. It further plays the role of making the people appreciate and respect the cultural diversity of Nigeria and to realize the need for cooperation, unity and peace in the country.

Social studies through citizenship education helps the child to understand the concept of national consciousness, patriotism and their implications (Fan, 2014). With effective teaching and learning of social studies at all levels of Nigerian education, there is the tendency of producing future leaders with national consciousness and patriotic behaviour which is lacking among the current democratic leaders.

Fan (2003) also noted that social studies helps to create in the learner a desire for intelligent, willing participation in civic and social activities and also providing students with knowledge, skills for occupation and family membership. Furthermore, social studies education plays a very crucial role in initiating logical thinking ability into the learners for useful social life, backed with political literacy; as well as promoting democratic principles for effective citizenship.

Implications of Social Studies education for nation building

Effective teaching and learning of social studies education across all Nigerian schools will help to enhance national integration germane for nation building and this will lead to the reduction in the clamour for disintegration among Nigerians. This is probably so because if good citizens who would turn out to become future leaders are produced with the right inculcation of the desired attitudes, skills, knowledge, moral uprightness, and values required for purposeful leadership, they can help to promote national integration thereby making nation building a reality and an easy task. The teaching and learning of social studies education if properly implemented would be of tremendous benefit in the following ways:

- i. If all Nigerian citizens are properly trained to understand democratic values such as rule of law, respect for other people's opinion, free and fair election, danger of buying and selling of votes during elections, the Nigerian society will be a safe place for all to live in, which would possibly enhance nation building and national development.
- ii. The teaching of citizenship education through social studies will help all Nigerian citizens to imbibe the culture of patriotism, humility, honesty, integrity, accountability, transparency, justice and teamwork among others.
- iii. Effective teaching and learning of social studies education would help to produce patriotic democratic leaders who could possibly go extra mile to see to the development of the nation at large without having any second thought.

iv. It will equally help the Nigerian citizens to understand the principle of togetherness and indivisibility of Nigeria through unity in diversity as rightly advocated by social studies education.

v. It will avail the citizens the opportunity of understanding the differences that exist in all of the cultures they are exposed to as well as allowing them the opportunity of living and working with other ethnic groups rather than people from their own ethnic group.

vi. Social studies education will equally afford the citizens the opportunity of understanding their role in the society and how their impact could change the world around them in ways considered to be desirable.

vii. Effective teaching and learning of social studies will help the citizens to become responsible individuals in their immediate environment and the society at large which would help in reducing social crimes; ushering in a harmonious and peaceful society.

Conclusion

The role that social studies education plays towards meeting the democratic leadership challenges in Nigeria cannot be jettisoned if the goal of building a nation that will stand out among the comity of nations is to be achieved. One can rightly conclude that when the knowledge of social studies is properly imparted on the learners, they will possibly discard the idea of tribalism and nepotism which has retarded Nigeria's nation building attempt as well as jeopardizing national integration. The rationale is that social studies is an integrated field of study loaded with the right ingredients required to produce good future democratic leaders who can make meaningful contributions for the betterment of the society.

This suggests that if the Nigerian citizens are taught through the teaching of social studies from the scratch to understand the democratic doctrine, their fundamental human rights and its application and live by them, Nigeria would possibly become a safe country for all and sundry and this will in turn pave way for nation building to thrive. Hence, social studies education helps to inculcate in the learner the desired values, attitudes, skills and knowledge relevant for nation building.

Recommendations

Sequel to the analysis on this paper, the following recommendations were advanced:

1. That Social Studies and Civic Educators Association of Nigeria (SOSCEAN) and Social Studies Association of Nigeria (SOSAN) should form a synergy under one umbrella in order to formulate strong plan for proper implementation of Social Studies Curriculum at all levels of the Nigerian education system.

2. That social studies should be taught at all levels of the education system by those who have the requisite qualifications like NCE, First degree, Master's and doctoral degrees in social studies education. When this is done, effective teaching and learning of Social Studies will be achieved.

3. Social studies education should be made compulsory at all levels of Nigerian education system ranging from basic, upper basic, senior secondary education levels

through higher institutions of learning, as this will help to curtail the widespread social vices as seen in the contemporary Nigerian society.

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