Citizenship Education for a Stable Democratic Dispensation and Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is the examination of the role of citizenship education in sustaining democracy and development. It analyses the meaning and objectives of citizenship education, democracy and its tenants as well as the basic features or elements of development. The paper proposes that educated leaders do better in leadership and educated citizens are easier to govern hence they will understand the essence of democracy and protect it for national development and that a politically stable environment is necessary for a development-oriented democracy.

Introduction:

As Nigeria celebrates fifteen years of uninterrupted democracy it is clear to all citizens that the way forward is not devoid of basic challenges. It is therefore necessary to continue to feature opinions and explore ideas for a better democratic dispensation. Citizenship education is here presented as one of the ways forward. Nigeria still possesses all the ingredient needed to realise its potentials needed as a truly great nation and a great society. What Nigeria requires in this period of her national development is the right leadership and good citizenship at all level of government leaders who are alive to their civic responsibilities (Ainabor 2004) such as harnessing and developing our vast, varied and diverse resources efficiently, selflessly and optimally in a sustained way of ensuring its existence, growth and development of a viable state; and citizens,
efforts geared towards making every member of the society recognise his/her responsibilities to the nation, his/her neighbour and to him/herself.

On the whole, citizenship education can also be referred to as the training of citizens to enable them know what constitutes the government and its responsibilities to the citizens; the citizens' rights and responsibilities to the government as well as obeying and upholding the constitution of a country. Such education, no doubt, will enable the citizens to participate and fit into the socio-political processes in the country. Civic responsibilities as used here would refer those things which the state or country expects citizens to do in return for the rights, freedom and liberties which the state grants and guarantees for her citizens.

In its simplest definition, democracy is the government of the people by the people and for the people. For better understanding of the concept however, let us briefly examine the three dimensions of democracy, namely; conceptual individual and structural. The concept of democracy denotes the conduct of public affairs based on the agreed social contract between the two major parties in polity; the government and the governed. It is based on certain ethics and environmental elements, the absence of which will make whatever structures of governance set up; to be weak and wobbling. The attitudinal or behavioural dimension of democracy grows from the conceptional base and connotes a kind of political values held based on our conception as well as perception of power and power relations within the democratic context.

The structures refer to the institutions and processes established to guide the conduct of public or political affairs such as political parties, electoral bodies, organs of government, type of party system, mass media etc. Besides the above democracy according to Omolayo and
Aworulaju (1987) has social, economic and political senses. In it's social sense it promises some kinds of equality shunning all forms of class differences; while in it's economic sense, it attempts to level inequalities of wealth and on it's political sense democracy aims basically at securing the consent of the governed, protecting his human personality and of achieving the common good (Adebimpe 2004).

Development as observed by Oladukun (2003) typically involves radicals changes in institutional, social and administrative structures, as well as in popular attitudes and sometimes even customs and beliefs. Development encompasses growth and changes in all sectors of a nation over a period of time. It involves the re-organisation and re-orientation of the whole economic, social and political systems (Adebimpe 2004).

Components of Citizenship Education
following intense research, Brown (1977) and Adekunle (1998) identified five components of citizenship education as follows:

1. To know what the principal issues are in contemporary society.
2. To know how to become better informed about the leading arguments of an issue.
3. To be able to appreciate the worth of the evidence on which disputes are based.
4. To have a predisposition to try to do something about civic issues and
5. To be respectful of the opinions and sincerity of others.

From the above Adebimpe (2004) deducts that citizenship education can be described as the type of education, both formal and informal directed at the entire citizenry of a particular country with the purpose of boosting their civic and political knowledge and understanding in order to enhance their participation and contribution to the socio-political development of their country, bearing in mind that a well educated citizenry will be easier to govern and control than uneducated ones. The formal type of citizenship education involves the classroom teachings whereby students (of various categories) are oriented on their civic and political duties and responsibilities as well as knowledge about their rights and obligations. The teaching of subjects such as civic, social studies, government, history political science, sociology, citizenship education in various levels of education system are aimed at inculcating the young once with the value system and ethics of the nation.

The Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council (NERBC) produced a curriculum for study of citizenship education study: Citizenship I and II. Citizenship Education I according to NBTE General studies syllabus for Diploma Programmes in Polytechnics and similar institutions in Nigeria was designed to expose the students to the basic concept, principles and provisions of the Nigerian constitution. At the end of this course, students are expected to:

1. Understand the constitution of Nigeria
2. Understand the Federal system of government in Nigeria.
3. Know the constitutional rights and obligations of Nigerian citizens
4. Understand citizenship
5. Know the fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy of Nigeria (NBTE 1990)

On the other hand Citizenship Education II, was designed to create awareness and consciousness of Nigerian political institutions and structures, democratic principles and social values in the minds of the students. At the completion of this course, students are expected to:

1. Understand government, political
parties and elections.
2. Know the arms of government-legislature, executive and judiciary.
3. Understand constituted authority and its role in society
4. Understand national identity, needs of the national identity and way of preserving national identity.
5. Understand national ethics and discipline in national life and

Much of the above listed are self explanatory, the philosophical objectives of citizenship education according to Emenemua (1995) is therefore premised on the fact that no society or country can progress or develop if the citizens do not possess the awareness of basic democratic principles and socio-political institutions in the country. To achieve political stability, or orderly development in any country, the citizens must be mobilized or oriented to display in their conduct, the spirit of patriotism, nationalism, political education and desirable habits. All these can be achieved through citizenship education. It must be noted that the Nigeria political scene had always witnessed discontinuities and instability due to maladministration, electoral fraud and corruption. Between 1960 and 2014. Nigeria has experienced different political regimes both military and civilian. It is to facilitate national growth and stability in our socio-political environment that courses in citizenship education are now being taught in all tertiary institutions in Nigeria (Ainabor, 2002).

the informal of citizenship education involves the type of education outside the classroom setting with an under audience and with the aim of sensitizing the general public about their civic and political responsibilities with the citizenry who will participate meaningfully in the affairs of their country. In Nigeria, the case for informal citizenship education has been vigorously pursued by successive regimes. For instance, the Shagari administration initiated Ethical Revolution, the Buhari-Idiagbon regime introduced War Against Indiscipline, the Babangida regime instituted Mass Mobilization for Self Reliance, social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) and the Abacha Junta established National Orientation Agency while the Obasanjo regime initiated the National Rebirth, (Adebbmpe 2004). The Objective of these policies is to sensitize and educate Nigerians on their civic and political responsibilities.

Olapade and Aderibigbe (2009) identify the rational for citizenship education to include: (i) social and moral responsibility (ii) political literacy (iii) community involvement (iv) observation of rights and duties and (v) National consciousness National identity. Leaders with the above qualities will govern better and followers (citizens) with the above qualities will be easier to govern for overall national development.

Essentials of Democracy
Identifying the essentials of democracy Adebbmpe (2003) postulated the following features.

a. The recognition and guaranteeing of the fundamental human right of citizens.

b. Free and fair elections held periodically to elect representatives.

c. Government is based on majority rule and respect for majority views.

d. Alternative choices and opposition parties are recognised and allowed to function.

e. There is popular consultation of the people by government before taking important decisions.
f. The government is based on rule of law and equality of individuals before the law.
g. Independency of the judiciary is guaranteed and
h. There is a periodically elected representative legislature.

In addition to the above, Akin­onigbinde (2003) identified such elements as general goodwill, social justice, tolerance, cooperation and economically friendly environment as essential for a good democratic dispensation. Democracy and development are closely linked in fundamental ways. Democracy for example provides the only long term basis for managing competing ethnic, religious and cultural interests in a way that minimises the risk of violence and internal conflict. Democracy though not the only means by which development and good governance can be achieved. It is the only viable option because it provided for a greater participation of all by guaranteeing that national goals with always reflect broad societal aspirations and priorities. such that things are not done without full consultation.

Development in Perspective.
Some authors have identified the following basic features of development;

a. A high level of literacy standard
b. Political stability
c. Well organised and accessible communication and transportation system.
d. High level of industrialisation
e. Availability of basic social amenities and
f. Low level of mortality especially at infant stage of life.

These are closely related to the standard of living of the citizenry, as the standard of living is often measured on the available and accessibility or otherwise of the basic social amenities. In addition, in developed countries there is none or low level of mortality rate as well as a well planned population growth rate: This enables the government to plan adequately for all her citizens.

Citizenship education and the enhancement of a stable democratic dispensation in Nigeria cannot be over-emphasised, for the fact that, education is vital to both personal and societal development. Educated citizens will have proper understanding of their rights and duties as a functional element of the society. Education will furnish him with societal requirement in terms of political social, economic and cultural contribution to the society.

The Way Forward
Living in Nigeria with open mindedness reveals in no doubt that a large portion of the Nigerian citizenry cannot boast of any applaudable culture of integrity, hardwork, self-reliance, honesty and moral rectitude as a legacy from previous and present generation of leaders. This has in advertently conditioned their psyche to create for themselves a culture that is not only deviant but self destructive. Citizenship education for all such citizens is and must be embraced as the way forward. The dwindling fortunes of our economy and cumulative negative effects of decisions taken by succeeding administration over the years have deeply affected all fabrics of our society. The inescapable backlash of a dislocation in the system, has found many youths flocking the streets and engaging in all manner of anti-social activities. The situation in which the youth of our country and hope of the nation seem entangle in a web of societal ills can only be undone by careful inculcation right societal values by way of citizenship education.

In his research Anya (2002) asserted that two-thirds of Nigerian youths who
have attained the age of adult employment are at present unemployed or under-employed. Two-thirds of all Nigerians live below the poverty line. Nearly half of all Nigerians are illiterate. Not more than one-third of the population of young Nigerians who should be at one or the other of our educational institutions are in fact receiving any education. Added to the above demobilizing tendency among Nigerian citizens, are food riots, violent protests over living conditions especially, housing, disillusionment and loss of hope in a viable future among the youth. Such, he added have brought down governments in history of our contemporary world.

In the face of these anomalies and disillusionments in the Nigerian polity there is need for the establishment of a body or institute charged with the responsibility of educating the citizens (the leaders and the led), to develop nationalistic and patriotic feelings, aimed at ensuring the overall survival of the entire Nigerian. Educated citizen will understand that other citizens of the society also have rights and duties in the state and that they will have to work in harmony with one another in order to realize their personal and societal goals.

Citizenship education will enable the citizens to be patriotic and loyal to the country. This will help them to defend the country's interest at all times and contribute to its growth and development. Besides that, citizens are to contribute their own quota to the development of the country. Citizenship education will enhance citizens in play their civic roles such as voting, contesting election, membership of pressure groups etc. Citizenship education is essential or rather vital to the sustenance of democracy and development, as educated people tend to have more knowledge about governmental affairs and developmental needs. Educated people may be easier to govern than the uneducated ones reason being that the educated ones know what is expected of them and those in government as well as know that they cannot take the people for granted. Since they the people know their rights and have the power (through election) to remove an irresponsible government. Thus a well educated society will foster democracy and societal development in all its ramifications.

Citizenship Education can serve as a means of commanding the allegiance of citizens as government is impaired when government is enable to live up to its civic responsibilities of solving socio-economic problems of citizens, nor evoke loyalty from its citizens. Citizenship Education will help to inculcate to all Nigerians the value and spirit of civic responsibility, commitment to social justice and economic self reliance through mobilization and harnessing of their energies and natural resources into productive use. It will also help to propagates the need to: eschew all vices in public life including corruption, dishonesty, electoral and census malpractices, ethnic and religious bigotry nation. It may not just be enough to introduce citizenship education in institution of learning there is need also to educate other citizens who may not have the privilege of attaining former education. The grassroots people also need citizenship education for proper mobilization even if done using our local dialects.

In another study Iyoha (1996) concluded that for a hungry, unemployed and educationally deprived Nigerian. Nigeria is nothing more than a geographical expression, a mere abstraction, thus, our conception of sustainable strategies of mobilisation must necessarily include willingness and commitment of Government, the amelioration of harsh economic conditions, the removal of unequal access to education, food, health care, political leadership, and access to pensionable government jobs. It is only then Nigerians can begin to see a positive political exchange between them and
government.

In order that people may happily embrace the values of citizenship education; government must move towards the provision of conducive atmosphere in form of free education, abundant food, jobs, accessible and affordable health care and cheap transportation then there will be pressure on the people to reciprocate by providing support and legitimacy to the values of citizenship education.

Conclusion
This paper has attempted to examine the place of citizenship education in the mobilization of citizens towards their civic responsibilities in Nigeria. It is observed that governments need to command the allegiance of citizens through public trust and alleviate harsh economic conditions faced by citizens in order to enable them appreciate the practical terms of government. Citizens need to be reminded constantly through citizenship education of their civic responsibility to remain united, God fearing and able to protect public property. The playing of their civic roles such as voting, contesting election, membership of pressure groups etc. can come as merits of such an education. This is essential to the sustenance of democracy and development. An informed people tend to have more knowledge about governmental affairs and development needs. They also know their rights and have the power to defend them responsibly.

In all a society with a future must consciously establish institutions to orientate citizens on the practical issues of government in order to carry them along in the practice of attaining national solitary and consequent development. This, citizenship education does and so must not be discarded if Nigeria is to take her place of pride in the community of nations.

References


