



Education for democratic citizenship: A challenge for multi-ethnic societies

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Abstract

This literature based paper examined some cardinal words as contained in the topic, which includes what education is, and a look at different definitions from different authors, its types and aims, democracy, the characteristics of a democratic society, multi-ethnic society and citizenship. The writers also looked at education for a society that is democratic and its essentials and tried to x-ray the Nigerian situation. In conclusion, the writers highlighted why education for a society that is democratic is essential for a nation like Nigeria and they are of the idea that the system of education of a nation has a huge role to play in enhancing unity among other things through democratic education. They suggested that more topics on democratic education should be added to subjects like, Civic Education and Social Studies, and that these subjects should be taught at all levels of our educational system.

Keywords: education, democracy, citizenship and multi-ethnic societies

1. Introduction

Universally today, democracy is being upheld and viewed as the best form of government, since it permits the citizens of any nation to take part in the governance process. Education serves as a channel for the advancement of active citizenship that is democratic in any political democracy. Democratic citizenship is membership in a political democracy, when the a nation's citizens are properly informed in the political system of their society then democracy is said to be strong but when the reverse is the case, democracy is viewed as being fragile. Thus it is necessary for citizens to be educated properly in a many-ethnic society like Nigeria so that the goals, aims, and objectives of a government that is democratic could be realized and sustained.

2. Definition of Education

There are diverse definitions and perspectives of education as there are diverse scholars in the field. Okoh (1998) [13] in defining education provided four broad based foundations.

He defined education using these four headings

- The stipulative meaning of education, which has to do with when someone stipulates, specifies the important elements or conditions that represent what one wants to mean education. Examples are education is power and a process of preparing for good life.
- The normative meaning of education is a definition that agrees with the generally acknowledged world pattern of what education is. This definition considers the formal education. Example of this meaning of education was given by Connor (1975) who defined education as "the process by which society through schools, colleges, universities and various institutions deliberately convey their cultural heritage".
- The socio-anthropological definition of education, which is basically looked at from the culture and socio-political

context of the socialization process. Thus the definition given by Oka for (1981) where education is defined as "the acculturation process by which the individual receives assistance to achieve the highest propelling of his potentials in line with the reason that is right thereby achieve his self-fulfillment or self-realization."

- Finally, the programmatic meaning of education considers the achievement or attainment of stated goals or objectives for a process to be viewed as an educative process. An example is the meaning of education as provided by Peters (1967), who considers education as "the processes of transferring what is worthwhile to the people who are committed to it. It also rules out some processes of transmission based on the basis that they lack voluntariness and willingness of the learner, and that education must touch comprehension, knowledge and some sort of cognitive perspective not inert".

However, a meaning of education that stands out for me is the one given by Osakayo (1987), which see education as "leading out of the unborn powers and potentialities of the individual in the society, the possession of skills altitudes and competencies necessary for self-actualization and coping with life problems."

Every society therefore has its aims and objectives of education and this tends to change in agreement with trends and time. The following are therefore the aims of Nigeria education as published in the National Policy on Education (2014) edition. It states that education is to build:

- (a) A free and democratic society.
- (b) A just and egalitarian society
- (c) A united, strong and self-reliant nation
- (d) A great and dynamic economy
- (e) A land full of bright opportunities for all citizens.

3. The concept of Democracy

The word originated from the ancient Greece. It is gotten from two Greek word “demos” meaning people and “Kratien” which refers to rule or power.

Based on the above, Abraham Lincoln (1895) definition of democracy fully gives a better understanding to the word democracy. He defined democracy thus “the people’s government, by the people, and for the people, that is the rulership of the people.”

According to Akpakpan and Umoh (1999): democracy “is a political system with high level of civil and political liberties, which gives room for competitions through electoral process” Ekpo, (2000) consider democracy as “a superior forms of government specifically in a nation that is developing like Nigeria, as it protects the right and interest of all individuals, groups, ensures majority rule and grants the majority the right of consent”. Democracy as a form of government is believed to be more desirable to other ways of government because it achieves more security, freedom, and co-operative diversity according to Hook (1942).

It is seen as a way of life as it deals with organizing human relationships that contains moral ideas. In today’s usage, democracy is the government where the citizens partake in the process of selection of their leaders, known as the “rule of the majority” according to Cambridge dictionary.

Democracy in its true state consists of four major elements according to Larry Diamond a political scientist which he identified to includes:

- A system used in choosing and replacing ruling government via fair and free election.
- The people are involved actively in the governance process and civic life
- The tenets on which the fundamental rights of humans are upheld.
- Equality before the law of every citizen is applied.

According to Omoregbe (2007) ^[14] the basic rudiments of democracy are:

1. It upholds fundamental human rights principles.
2. There is power separation among the three arms of government.
3. Freedom of opinion (speech, press, etc) is upheld.
4. There is religious liberty
5. Citizens of voting age possess voting right and can also be voted for.
6. Good governance is a basic principle.
7. The principles of rule of law are also upheld.

4. Citizenship Defined

Citizenship is a concept misunderstood often and wrongly applied by some writers. Most times the concept is used as if it means the same thing as citizen. Such writers like Nwanna and Odoh (2013) Brown (2014) ^[9] to mention but a few.

Citizenship is a status given to an individual acknowledged under the law as a state that is sovereign legal member. Citizenship is also seen as to be a citizen of a country.

According to Wikipedia, citizenship is “who a person is as acknowledged under the custom or law as a sovereign state legal member.”

Citizenship also means a status earned by fulfilling the legal

requirements of a Nation, State or Local Government. It entails granting of certain opportunities and rights to its citizens by a nation.

According to scholastic teacher as contained in scholarstic.com/activities/civics, citizenship was defined as the state of being given the rights, opportunities and roles of a citizen.

5. A democratic society

According to Omoregbe (2007) ^[14]; - A society is seen to be democratic when the rule of law tenets, speech freedom, association freedom, freedom of worship, the rights of humans, etc are upheld. A society that is democratic could be viewed as one where citizens become informed in an environment via newspaper; web- based and broadcast media. Its a form of society that favours equal right, speech freedom and a fair trial and welcomes the minority’s views as stated civics living in a society that is democratic.

A society that is democratic is one that works for a better democracy, the citizens and the institutions have the desire, opportunities and trust to function together.

Democratic society is one where its citizens are educated and informed about their rights and privileges, for example, the right to vote and be voted for, freedom of speech, etc.

6. Characteristics of a democratic society

According to the Australian collaboration (a collaboration of national community organization) the features of a place that is democratic include:

- Freedom of choice making about their lives.
- Developing their potentials as human beings
- Living a life free from fear, harassment and discrimination
- Guaranteeing speech freedom, assembly, religion, etc
- Ensuring a judiciary that is independent
- Ensuring equality before the law of all citizens.
- Guaranteeing freedom of the press, thus social ills like corruption, malpractice and incompetence are exposed.

7. Multi –Ethnic Society

Multi- Ethnic society is a society that consists of many ethnic groups in a nation. A typical example of a society that is multi-ethnic is Nigeria. It is a society involving several ethnic groups. Multi –ethnic society could have people of diverse ethnicities. Its tenets are peaceful co –existence and tolerance. Ethnic group attributes consist of a cultural heritage that is shared, history, homeland, and language, symbolic system (religion, dressing style, and physical appearance)

People in a multi – ethnic society usually belong to more than an ethnic group. Our nation (Nigeria) is multi – ethnic, consisting of about 250 ethnic groups with three of the group Hausa – Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo as the largest.

Other democratic multi – ethnic societies worldwide are: Britain, the USA, South Africa, Canada, China, Brazil, Turkey, Russia, Spain, India, Kenya, etc.

8. Democratic citizenship education in a society that is multi-ethnic

Education’s role in producing democratic citizenship cannot be over looked especially in a society that is multi- ethnic such as Nigeria. Education is essential for the promotion of core

values like democracy, rule of law, human rights etc.

The importance of education in upholding democratic citizenship could be found in the adoption of the Council of Europe Charter on democratic citizenship education and education of human rights by the organization's 47 member States. In the framework of recommendation CM/Rec/ (2010). The main national goals of Nigeria as contained in the National Policy of Education (2014) is that education should aid the development of a:

- A free and democratic society
- A just and egalitarian society
- A united, strong and self-reliant nation
- A great and dynamic economy
- A land full of bright opportunities for all citizens.

Democratic citizenship is geared towards the development of a nation and education is the instrument for it. The general Nigerian philosophy is to live in harmony and unity as one indissoluble, democratic, indivisible and indivisible nation that is sovereign founded on freedom principles, equality and justice (National Policy on Education, 2014, p4). Democratic citizenship education introduction should be at all stages of our educational system via subjects like Social Studies and Civic Education, and made compulsory as this will aid active participation of the citizens in the process of democracy (voting, decision making, etc).

According to Mill as edited by Zalta (2008), education pertaining to democratic citizenship will entail "participation of ideas" (that is viewing the ideas of others).

Matter (2005) explains that policies help in the building of citizenship, stating that "policies inform citizens and that citizens become better informed, more participatory or more civic by virtue of having been and knowing that they are affected by a policy or programme" (this is what education does).

The education pertaining to democratic citizenship equally means education, training, dissemination of information, activities and practices which gear towards equipping the learner with knowledge, skills, understanding and mould their behavior and attitudes in exercising and defending their rights to democracy and responsibility where they live. In a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria, democratic education plays an outstanding part in the life of her citizen as it helps the citizen to value diversity with a view to enhancing and preserving the rule of law and democracy.

In a nutshell, education on democratic citizenship provides knowledge, understanding, skills and attitude which will help the citizens to effectively function in their society. It informs and educates the citizens about their rights, responsibilities and duties. It aids them to be aware of what they can influence and change.

Education for citizenship is not only about voting, but deals with the skills of learning and knowing how to resolve family issues without taking to violence.

Democratic citizenship is a skill and skills are to be learned, thus the younger ones should know how they could have a voice in the society they live and why it is important for them to do so.

For a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria, education on democratic citizenship is essential as it will inform the citizens

of their responsibilities. Education will help in producing active citizens which is the basic pillar on which democracy will work. Thus citizens should be involved in voting, communicating with the officials that have been elected and volunteering, that is making themselves available when called to serve.

9. The Nigerian situation

In order to enhance awareness principles that are democratic, the Nigeria government established the National Orientation Agency in 2005, which motto is "do the right thing: transform Nigeria" with the purpose of imparting government policy, encouraging patriotism, national oneness and development of Nigeria society". This agency also work hand in hand with other non-governmental organizations in educating citizens on the democracy principles, which is to serve as an insulator against the rise in electoral violence, racism and extremism, xenophobia, discrimination and intolerance.

Despite the effort by government, it has been observed that the reverse is the case, as these vices are evident in the political life of Nigeria. Democratic citizenship in Nigeria is supposed to educate citizens that will be free to make their own decisions and express their convictions. Also, it is supposed to help in producing democratic citizens who will respect the views of others irrespective of notable differences like religious beliefs, political affiliation, sexism and racism.

However, it seems that enough is not being done by our country's educational system in this regard. The system does not fully integrate citizenship education at all stages of learning and the mode of transferring knowledge differs from one section of the country to another due to language, customs and beliefs.

For the above reasons, democratic citizenship which is necessary in transforming a place remains a challenge in Nigeria.

10. Conclusion

Democratic citizenship education is concerned mainly with democratic rights and responsibilities, active participation as it relates to civic, political, social, economic, legal and cultural segment of the society. These are very essential to every society but most especially to multi ethnic societies of which Nigeria is one.

It is essential for every citizen(s) to have knowledge of what democracy entails and to strive towards upholding its tenets so that our national policy will be achieved and sustained. Essentially therefore, education on democratic citizenship denotes:- education, training, dissemination, information, practices, and activities that aims at equipping learners with knowledge, skills, and understanding which shapes their behaviors and attitudes as to empower them to exercise and protect their democratic right and responsibilities in the society to appreciate diversity, and also part take in democratic life aimed at enhancing and preserving the rule of law and democracy.

Nigeria's system of education has an enormous role to play in encouraging unity in this multi-ethnic nation Nigeria through democratic education. The tenets of democracy like freedom of expression for instance should be operational in the school system, by so doing, the learner is allowed to partake in the

processes of making decisions.

There should be periodical enlightenment campaigns by professional and other nongovernmental bodies towards attaining democratic citizenship skills, attitudes, knowledge etc from the grass root.

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