
CIVIC EDUCATION: A VERITABLE TOOL FOR NATION BUILDING

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Abstract

The effective implementation of civic education for sustainable national development cannot be over-emphasised. This paper examines the essence of civic education for sustainable nation building, issues and conditions that may jeopardize the effectiveness of civic education in Nigeria, and the role of civic education in promoting responsible citizenship, duties and obligations of a responsible citizen. It was concluded that civic education will help the young ones to imbibe the values, norms, knowledge, actions that will promote national development. Hence, Ministry of Education and other educational agencies should make funds available for the pursuits of civic education.

Key words: Civic Education, Nigeria, Nation building, Citizenship, National development.

Introduction

The future of any country depends on the youths in that country. No meaningful development can take place without their active participation. They are the young people, endowed with raw energy. They have high hopes, dreams, aspirations and ideas of what their tomorrow would be. They are anxious and dynamic, always bubbling

in spirit. Their surplus energy when exploited is useful for the welfare of the country. Proper guidance and direction can bring them to the forefront of peaceful and national development.

One viable way of achieving this is through civic education, which inculcates sound moral values in the youths. It is the education which aims to help people learn how to become active, informed and responsible citizens (Falade, 2008). Civic education remains an important means of teaching the populace about individual rights and what duties and responsibilities the leaders and the led should have.

The noble values of honesty, obedience, hardwork, tolerance and faith are germane to stabilising national life and upholding same for determining the development and progress of a nation. Such values regulate the life of a nation and project good image for the country (Abubakar, 2011). Hence, the need to introduce civic education to teach citizens the virtues of good citizenships, particularly, the values of obedience, humility and submission to constituted authority.

It can be argued that the current insecurity challenges facing the country, ethnic and religious violence, terrorism, kidnapping, rape, political mugging and other social vices are results of the abandonment of civic education by successive governments. Lack of civic education and patriotic orientation had led to disorientation in schools and the larger society, leading to serious consequences (Sofadekan, 2012).

The prevalence of corruption, indiscipline, disrespect for both elders and the rule of law, indifference to duty, embezzlement of public funds, are clear manifestations of the absence of civic education. Civic values, such as courtesy, respect, charity, tolerance, dialogue have disappeared in our society. There is an apparent entrenchment of militarism, especially among the youth.

The dwindling national consciousness, social harmony and patriotic zeal has necessitated re-introducing civic education in Nigerian primary and secondary schools, because civic education is a very viable tool for peace building, particularly in heterogeneous democratic society like Nigeria (Abubakar, 2011).

In civic education, part of the curriculum is knowing about values and different ethnic groups, their values and traditions. If somebody from the South knows the way people from the North behave, and their values, he or she will appreciate them more. Civic education teaches how to appreciate other people, their religion, and culture. When you know how other people behave, you can easily relate with them. Civic education will help Nigerian youths know about their immediate environment and the culture of people they live with.

There is the need for children of these days to know about their society. Many of them believe in Western culture and know nothing about African culture. Civic education will help them know that African culture is rich and different from Western culture. The knowledge of culture and tradition of different parts of the country would ensure more tolerance among the youths, thereby reducing youth restiveness, ethnic and religious crisis, which are threats to a peaceful society.

Crisis-free Nigeria could only be possible when the young ones who would take over the mantle of leadership from the elders tomorrow, know what could lead to crisis and the best ways of avoiding and resolving crisis. These are part of the curriculum of civic education.

If the youths are given adequate civic education, they will have sound mind and tomorrow Nigeria will be great, devoid of problems of embezzlement, corruption, cheating and others. They will be able to know what government wants so that there will be peace and tranquility in the country.

The Conceptual clarification

Social Studies is a dynamic course of instruction with major focus on how to reshape the thinking patterns, social life, skills, attitudes and values of citizens towards the progressive development of the society (Mezieobi, 2008). Ezegbe (2008) observed that social studies addresses human problems in all ramifications. Social studies is a reformatory school instruction designed to equip learners with desirable attitudes, values, skills and knowledge for cohesive social existence in the Nigerian society. Conflicts, cooperation,

disorganization, tolerance and accommodation are social facts manifest in a plural society as Nigeria.

Civics tend to study the operations of government and its political dynamics. It exposes the learner to civic responsibilities, such as, being law abiding, paying of taxes, voting objectively, the essence of political participation, involvement in military service for national defence and acting as witnesses in judicial matters. The major focus of civics is the exposition of rights and duties of citizenship. Governments are stabilized through the legitimate support and positive conducts of the citizenry in the political process of nation states. According to Mezieobi (2006), civics education has become a veritable strategy of sensitizing and localizing education to national needs and values while equipping the learner with the functional skills to participate as effective citizens in national development, through adequate political, economic, social and technological socialization.

Esedebe (2003) remarked that nation building is a complex concept with focused intention of integrating ethnic groups in a polity for sustainable development. Mezieobi (2008) opined that nation building is geared towards promoting political, economic, social and technological stability of nations. Civics education, if effectively internalized by students and general Nigerian public, will enshrine moral and political order for our national existence. However, Iwe (1991) condemns the materialistic values of Nigerians which has downplayed values, such, as dignity of man and labour, justice, merit, truthfulness amongst others.

Constraints

Some of the issues and conditions that may jeopardize the effectiveness of civics education in Nigeria are delineated.

1. *Social Crisis*: Conflicts are bound to occur in a pluralistic society like Nigeria and they span the cultural religious, political, economic and social spheres of life. The conflicts arise from the pursuit of divergent interests, goals and aspirations by individuals and groups (Akpochafo, 2010). Frequent conflicts in the Nigerian society may interfere with the values canvassed by civics education.

2. *Corruption:* Civics education is to enthrone discipline, justice and integrity in our national life, but instead the tempo of corruption amongst politicians and public officers have increased geometrically over the years (Sofadekan, 2012). Therefore, Toyo (2001) is skeptical if national consensus can be realized in a polity enveloped with extreme corruption, anarchy, mass oppression and dictatorship, including gross social irresponsibility.
3. *Inadequate Instructional Experts in Civics Education:* Civics education is yet to have specialists. As such, it is going to be implemented by Social Studies teachers. Irejefoju and Mezieobi (2007) in their study found that Social Studies teachers displayed negative attitudes towards the separation of civics from social studies. The teachers may perceive the introduction of civics as a threat to their course specialization.
4. *Miscellaneous Factors:* Irejefoju and Mezieobi (2007) identified the lapses in the effective implementation of citizenship education in Nigerian secondary schools as ineffective teaching methods, corruption, anti-social behaviour in the society value conflict, lopsided citizenship status, limited national consciousness, inadequate use of instructional resources. These same lapses may be applicable in the implementation of civics education.
5. *Funding:* Introduction of civics education in lower, middle and upper basic education level requires funding in terms of producing effective instructional materials, training of teachers, organizing of seminars, workshops and conferences. In the interim, social studies experts ought to produce materials, provide teachers and ensure effective implementation of civics education at all levels of our education since it is an embodiment of Social Studies.
6. *Defective Teaching Method:* Lecture method should not dominate the implementation of civics education instruction. Discussion, role play, projects, inquiry, field trips and problem solving approach should be extensively used. Lecture method

encourages regurgitation of facts without emphasis on the affective domain of learning. Teaching strategy ought to be highly learner-centered in order to evoke high level learner participation, stimulation of interest and realistic learning experiences to sensitive learners towards acquiring social habits, conducts and skills to promote sustainable democratic governance and nation building.

The Essence of Civics Education for Achieving Sustainable Nation Building

Civics education is primarily designed to create a disciplined society for coordinated, harmonious and stable democratic growth for sustainable nation building. These attributes are expressed in the following ways:

1. *Installing a Reputable Democratic Electoral Process:* The Nigerian electoral system is in a state of flux. The electoral instruments have undergone reforms, though inadequate, and have suffered implementation neglect. The ascertained lapses in the electoral system is a shared responsibility of the system and the manipulators of the system, continuous political orientation and education is inevitable (Mezieobi and Mezieobi, 2008). Civics education will usher disciplined political conducts in our body politic through intellectual development and psychological training that political leadership is for societal service rather than avenues for self enrichment.
2. *Effective Citizenship Development:* Effective citizenship is a very important deciding factor in nation building in both developed and developing countries. Also, national development plans (economic, social, political, scientific and technological aspects) cannot be well implemented without the contributions of effective and incorruptible citizens (Okobia, 2007). Functional citizenship, with sound moral consciousness transparency and committed patriotic spirit, is ideal for sustainable nation building.
3. *Enthroning Democratic Stability through National Consensus:* Democratic stability in a polity is achieved through collective national consciousness and determined efforts of citizens to

eschew undue inclination to ethnicity, parochial sentiments and mediocrity in the march towards achieving sustainable nation building (Mezieobi, 2008).

4. *Enlightening Citizens on their Civic Obligations:* It is the place of civics education to remind citizens of their inviolable civic obligation to nation building. Against this background, Nwabueze (1982) and Mezieobi (2006) remarked that civic obligations include: not only exercise of franchise and payment of taxes, but it has comprehensively embraced display of disciplined social habits, maintenance of healthy conditions, self reliance spirit and obedience to law, restraints in the abuse of office or power, patriotic feelings, respect for national interest and a sense of commitment to the constitution. Others are uplifting the image of the country, defending the country during emergencies, and assisting in the maintenance of social order in the polity. In addition, there are protecting public funds from misappropriation and squandering. Including, showing commitment to community, state and national development, lawful declaration of asset on demand by lawful agents, amongst others.
5. *Political Socialisation:* Civics education is prominently focused on promoting political literacy; voter education, increasing participation in politics, inculcating skills for interpreting, analyzing and evaluating political issues. It is aimed at equipping learners with skills for good governance, management of public affairs and resources, leadership training, peace-making, mediating and resolving conflicts that could mar nation building, displaying transparent attitudes in the conduct of national affairs and always being poised for the feelings of patriotic ethnic integration. In all, civics education is expected to achieve democratic governance, stability and sustainable nation building.

The Role of Civic Education in Promoting Responsible Citizenship

Civic Education, as a discipline, is geared towards ensuring responsible citizenship in these respects: The various aims and objectives of civic education, such as inculcating in the child the spirit of self-discipline, hardworking, cooperation and respect for authority, developing in the child an awareness of and a desirable attitude to the Nigerian constitution are directed towards promoting responsible citizenship. The philosophy of Nigerian Education and the National Policy on Education, where the goals of civic education are derived, were developed to produce responsible citizenship.

Civic education is highly indispensable in producing responsible and dynamic citizens who will be conscious of the need for moral uprightness as an important ingredient of nation building that will in turn help to bring back or renew traditional values and virtues, such as honesty, obedience, respect, loyalty, justice and fair play and humility etc., that have been eroded or lost in our country.

The curriculum of civic education at each level of education is tailored towards ensuring responsible citizenship. This is because it affords the people the opportunity to know about positive aspects of national life, such as unity and faith, peace and progress, national consciousness and national identity and national security. Civic education affords the citizens of their civic rights, such as the right to life, right to fair hearing as well as their duties, obligations and responsibilities which include being law abiding, respect for the rights of others, payment of taxes and rates and even the qualities of responsible citizens, like responses to national calls and respect for the national symbols.

Civic education is well packaged and it embodies sound education and all round education for children and adults to live a full and useful life in the society. It focuses on the children and ensures that they are well brought up and goes a long way to guarantee responsible citizenship.

The various topics and contents taught in civic education such as values, citizenship, national consciousness and national identity, human rights and rule of law and duties and responsibilities of citizens and the like, as well as the knowledge gained in the course

of undergoing the various issues, are supposed to equip Nigerians with skills to deal with various social and personal issues, including economic life skills. Civic education also promotes and sustains peace and political stability of a nation. Every citizen, in this case, would be aware of his basic rights, obligations and responsibility for the growth and development of Nigeria as a whole.

Duties and Obligations of a Responsible Citizen

The strength and orderliness of a society depends upon the extent to which its members perform their duties. In any organized community, there are rules and regulations which control individuals. Our performance of these duties and obligations go a long way to bring peace and progress to the society. The following are the duties and obligations of a responsible citizen:

- i. *Obeying the Law:* Law and order can only be maintained when citizens are law abiding. Citizens must abide by the constitution; respect its ideals and its institutions, the national flag, National Pledge, the legitimate and properly constituted authorities.
- ii. *Assisting Law Enforcement Agencies:* A responsible citizen is expected to assist the law- enforcement agents to maintain law and order, and in some cases report criminal suspects to the police. Even though Nigerians are in the habit of not willing to assist the police, such habit should be discouraged. They should, therefore, see the law-enforcement agents, especially the police as partners in progress.
- iii. *Payment of Taxes:* It is the civic duty of every responsible citizen of Nigeria to pay taxes and other rates. Our inability to pay taxes will make it difficult for the government to provide essential services for the citizens.
- iv. *Loyalty:* The responsibility of any citizen is to be loyal to the government to help enhance the power, prestige and good name of the country to make positive and useful contributions to the advancement, progress and well-being of the nation and must not plan for the downfall of the government.

- v. *Defence:* Every responsible citizen is expected to serve his/her country when occasion calls for it, especially during military attack from another country.
- vi. Citizens should be proud of their nation and strive to improve the image of their country. Nigerian citizens must try not to be jailed in a foreign country for offences like smuggling of hard drugs.

Concluding Remarks

It is a well known fact that no society, family or country can develop without peace. No community or nation carries out any developmental programme in the time of war. No family can make any meaningful progress when disorder and quarrel remain the order of the day. Similarly, a nation divided against itself cannot stand. Such a nation cannot develop or progress. Hence, government agencies like National Orientation Agency (NOA), Ministry of Information should carry out massive enlightenment campaigns to educate people on their civic rights, because the prevalence of various social malaises in the country is due to lack of proper orientation of the youth and lack of exemplary leadership.

Government should sponsor civic education programmes in television and radio stations and enlighten the masses daily on values and norms. Civic education should not be targeted at the educated alone. Traders, artisans, brick layers, boys in the creek and others who make up the larger number of youth should be educated on civics as well.

Lack of parental care and guidance on the youth has also contributed to sectarian violence witnessed in the country recently. The terrorist activities of the Boko Haram sect is an example of failure of proper parental guidance. If parents start early to educate their children on proper morals and values, violence in the country would reduce. The crucial role of parents as the first level of contact with the children is on the verge of collapse. Many parents hardly spend time with the children to groom them spiritually, socially, morally and otherwise. A well-brought-up child will certainly contribute towards the peaceful growth of the country.

In order to strengthen civic education more, so as to achieve sustainable national development, the following views become pertinent:

1. The realization of national unity national progress and harmonious co-existence of ethnic nations constituting Nigeria' geo-polity requires the teaching of our common historical, social, economic and political experiences through civic education instruction (Mezieobi, 2008).
2. Social studies teachers and experts should be used in the effective implementation of civics education.
3. Social studies academics should be challenged to publish materials for civic education.
4. The introduction of civics education will not entail the removing of social studies as a compulsory subject in junior secondary schools.
5. Diversified method of instruction should be used in teaching civics education.
6. Civics education curriculum for sustainable nation building should be learner-centered.
7. Nigerians should shun corruption, embrace patriotism, national consensus, and qualitative leadership in order to achieve democratic governance.
8. Civics education as a strategic option for achieving sustainable democratic stability should be vigorously funded.

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