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# CIVIC LEARNING IN NIGERIA: THE LOGICAL THINKING APPROACH TO SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CHALLENGES

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## ***Abstract***

*It is expected of every nation to show concern for the education of her citizens. Such education should foster in learners the ability to engage in logical reasoning in order to make life worthwhile and to be able to take independent decisions as well as exercise their will power. This paper examines the issue of civic learning and how its essence can be achieved through logical thinking to bring about desired peace and progress in the society. The paper posits that logical reasoning is essential in demonstrating civic attitudes and that experiential learning is a necessary component by which this can be achieved in learners. The paper concludes on the need for educators to stimulate and give promotion of logical reasoning in education a prime place within the teaching and learning activities in schools.*

**Key words:** *Logical thinking, Education, Civic learning, Social Political challenges.*

## **Introduction**

Society is designed as a community of people who relate with one another and with the purpose of promoting the well-being of her members. It is a form of relationship and companionship in which organised group of people share interests and/or goal(s). In other words, the term, society provides an understanding of how society works or ought to work to achieve her aims and objectives. Thus, society is a group of people that share common interests; people who are joined by mutual consent to deliberate, determine and act towards a common goal (The English Dictionary 3.1) especially, of promoting peaceful co-existence to overcome challenges and develop the society. The trends and understanding of what society means to the younger generation calls for greater attention in order to clarify what it is today in contrast to what it ought to be. At a time when the society is under pressure to improve the living standard of its members, it is imperative to give priority to issues that can establish ideals society needs to meet her cravings and what it is designed for. This can be achievable through a well-planned educational programme.

Education as a process is of different forms and involves various activities. According to Ayeni (2004), education is a polymorphous activity which is multifaceted. Therefore, it is definable and conceptualised from various perspectives. This impression suggests that there can be various motives for the offshoot of several educational institutions in the country and of course, different fields of academic leanings. The increase in educational institutions and fields of academic study cannot but have its basis in some arguable aims. The overt and presentable aim among others is the ambition of the citizenry to receive the best education possible. Such education is believed to manifest in good grades in examinations, certificate to show for this, and good conducts as well as attitudes that depict an understanding of the contents of study. For instance, an appreciation and demonstration of civic knowledge to confront social and political challenges facing the society is a workable example, here.

Nigerian education, presently, can be described as wading through the tide of times. Several irregularities surround the

educational system; the ideologies of educational programmes that emerge from various ruling arms or groups/parties appear nebulous judging from the intellectual and moral output of the educational institutions and their products. This makes the National Policy on Education appear a fantasy rather than a reality. Confirming this, Osiyale (2004) remarked that policy inconsistency and misplaced priorities of successive governments since independence have been identified as the bane of Nigeria's education system. A remark of this nature, whether valid or not, opens the mind of educators as well as concerned citizens to the fact that Nigeria's education system has a yawning gap to fill if it is to achieve its aims as stated in the National Policy document. Incongruity in the Nigerian educational system manifests in various forms of social ill like examination malpractice, incessant strikes, cultism, commercialisation of education through indiscriminate establishment of educational centres and campuses with programmes that offer nothing but a jettisoning of the ideal curriculum, among others. It therefore becomes essential to examine critically what could be assumed to be the missing elements in the educational system.

A clearly observable feature of Nigeria's education process is the practice of teaching and learning to regurgitate facts and return same in examinations. This practice often encourages the learner in copious assimilation of materials from books and handouts with less interest in developing a spirit of inquiry into the use and relevance of the facts learnt. This missing element inevitably brings flaws into the education system in the sense that the system is made to produce certificated individuals with a low thinking as well as logical reasoning capacity. This paper thus seeks to examine thinking as an essential feature of learning with a view to suggesting a need to promote civic knowledge through active thinking in the classroom and logical reasoning. Through this, learners will be empowered to confront social and political challenges in their daily lives.

### **Conceptual Analysis**

Thinking and perception can be considered as the foundational as well as functional basis of logical reasoning. Thinking is a human activity that goes synonymously with living. This is because every

human being thinks notwithstanding his/her social and cultural background; this helps to shape the mode of his/her activity. Activity and experience of living can give vent to thinking. The process of education, which dwells on the acquisition of knowledge and experience, relies heavily on thinking to achieve its purpose. This is in view of the fact that man thinks to interpret and understand himself, other people, as well as the world phenomena, to make sense of these for useful living.

Since education thrives on teaching and learning how to think, it is worthwhile for educators to ask what thinking is, as a first step to exploring education. Biggie (1982) once understood thinking to embrace simple association, recall, fantasy, dreams, animism as well as creative ideational activity. This perhaps provides a basis for O'Connor's contention that the word 'thinking' is ambiguous and refers to a number of different activities, including reasoning, imagining and remembering. This is an attempt to define the concept of thinking in purely behavioural terms.

Thinking from the philosophical standpoint is a human activity that engages the use of the mind to sift, sort impressions, and interpret same to make ideas. One needs a mind to think and the material for the thinking process derives primarily from sensations which include feelings, impressions, awareness, consciousness, perception, and responsiveness. However, further thinking could take place on previous thoughts as in the case of rational thinking. Snook (1973) contended that thinking as a human process is goal-centred. According to him, the first distinction that forces itself upon man is that thinking is used both to describe some pondering, concentrating, or working towards a goal, and also to denote possession of a belief. What is pertinent to thinking is that, it is an activity of the mind. In addition to this, the mental activity of thinking is set towards a goal, which ultimately sums up in the possession of a belief. However, one may not see this as exclusive since it is possible to think arbitrarily without a defined focus like in the case of a person in a trauma who engages in what may be understood as informal thinking in which the mind wonders on nature, the world, or even on celestial realities without any preset objectives.

Again, it could be asked; does thinking imply the same thing when a person is daydreaming, fantasising or night dreaming? What of a situation when a person is involved in a discussion? Also, is man's situation of thinking at interviews the same as writing examinations? These terms are coined to explicate dimensions for which thinking could make connection with knowledge. They are however not exclusive.

Inquiry thinking can be said to take place in a man when he makes efforts to find out facts and figures about life and like beyond. He brings to awareness within his mind some experiences along with new sense data with a view to interpret and make sense of the experiences. Inquiry thinking is made usually with respect to quiddity or essential characters of a phenomenon. On the other hand, utilitarian thinking dwells on seeking relationship and relevance among phenomena. A utilitarian thinker for instance, shows recognition for objects of sensation and examines the use or purpose these objects could serve. He is in the philosophic, traditional sense, a pragmatic thinker, who reposes the validity of knowledge to the usefulness or workability of what is acclaimed as known.

It is believed that every action of man has some thinking at its base. O'Connor (1971) gave a hint to backup this view. According to him, thinking is not an all-or-none affair, but a matter of degree and so too with the rest of those philosophical concepts whose vagueness can be elucidated in this way. The result of the elucidation is to show that these concepts are in no way like precise, clear cut, technical terms. These reiterate the earlier assertions that thinking, as a human activity, is synonymous with living. Man lives to think and thinks to live. The activity of thinking is progressive through times and circumstances. To sum up, thinking is both a cognitive skill as well as the end-product of such skill. It is habitual in man and can harness impressions into ideas. Such ideas are preserved as memory data to be recalled and used when the need arises. Thinking may be problem-focused when the human mind ponders on matters or issues requiring clarity and interpretation for meaningful living and relationships.

### **Civic Learning in the Society**

Civics is connected and related to governance of a society. It has to do with the duties and obligations of belonging to a community. Civic learning, therefore, entails the process of acquiring information, knowledge or facts about governance in a particular society. The working definition of civic learning, otherwise referred to as Civic Education, can thus be taken as the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and experience to prepare someone to be an active, informed participant in democratic life (Campbell, Levinson and Frederick, 2012). If Civic learning or education is expected to ensure the foregoing, then the question to ask is; why are the products of this education not manifesting the objectives of the course or subject? There has been a decline in civic learning; the subject at a period was expunged from school curriculum but recently re-introduced. Perhaps, this has led to a decline in civic engagements and responsibilities. There have been divisions among the people for instance, intra and inter religious crises, intra and inter ethnic/geo-political crises, lack of trust in government perhaps, because 'our tribesman' is not at the helms of affairs, hence, enmity by other tribes.

A likely response may be that the subject is not designed to capture the beliefs, experiences as well as practices of the people. Levinson (2012) posited that it is important that Civic Education navigates the diverse beliefs, experiences, cultures, practices, values, language, on a regular basis. According to him, schools need to figure out how to accommodate differences, in ways that are developmentally appropriate, civically constructive, respectful of members' disagreement over various questions and legal matters. He went further to state that schools also need to foster students' civic-mindedness – a sense of civic identity, an understanding of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, and a motivation to become civically and politically involved. This means that the school has more responsibilities and roles to play than they presently do.

In essence, if different learning institutions can focus on helping students learn how to respect and work collaboratively across lines of differences, therefore, they can ensure that students not only acquire a crucial set of civic and political skills, but also develop

appropriate democratic attitudes about the value of diversity to a just equal, and well-run political order (Levinson, 2012). In other words, such schools would help students become comfortable with both superficial and deep differences, which are crucial for effective participation in civic and political life to confront social and political challenges.

Apart from the above, it is also important that students are made to encounter and ultimately come to value multiple perspectives. Thus, schools should take advantage of the diversities in culture, language, ethnic, etc among learners to ensure highly supported conversations about controversial topics and different ways of life. They can teach students how to listen carefully, how to ask questions of one another to understand others' perspectives better, how to express their own beliefs and values in a respectful way that others can comprehend, and how to question their own initial assumptions. However, all these are hinged on the learners' ability to perceive, comprehend, think or reason logically in order to conclude and take a utilitarian decision beneficial to confronting social, political and other challenges facing the society.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The pragmatists have asserted that to learn active citizenship, one needs to be an active citizen. In other words, Civic education/learning must be experiential (Glickman, 2003). This is evident in the strong manifesto for the Deweyan approach to education. The 2011 Action Civics Declaration, which recommends “an authentic, experiential approach in which students address problems through real-world experiences that apply to their lives....” supported this. Experiential education is a process through which a learner constructs knowledge, skill, and value from direct experiences (Luckman, 1996). Experiential learning occurs when carefully-chosen experiences are supported by reflection, critical analysis and synthesis; experiences are structured to require the learner to take initiatives, make decisions, and be accountable for the results throughout the experiential learning process. The learner is actively engaged in posing questions, investigating, experimenting, being curious, and solving problems, assuming responsibility, being

creative and constructing meaning. Learners are engaged intellectually, emotionally, socially, soulfully, and/or physically. This involvement produces a perception that the learning task is authentic, the results of the learning are personal and form the basis for future experiences and learning. Relationships are developed and nurtured; learners to self, learner to others, and learner to the world at large. This can be powerful motivating experiences, setting them on a path towards lifelong civic and political engagement. In essence, experiential learning can be employed to develop learners to imbibe, inculcate and demonstrate the attitudes of being informed and active participants to solve problems facing societies.

It is essential that an appraisal of the Civic Education curriculum be carried out to accommodate experiential learning process and activities in schools. Learners should be made to realise and understand the diverse nature of the society so as enable them to accommodate cultural and other differences prevalent in their vicinity and develop tolerance towards others. All these will promote the attitudes and cultures of critical thinking and logical reasoning to facilitate actions that can overpower/overcome social and political challenges.

It is needful that educators should give the promotion of logical thinking in education a prime place within the teaching and learning activities in schools. This will go a long way to encourage attitudes of utilitarian reasoning that will produce good consequences which will bring about peaceful co-existence to confront social and political challenges in the country. In the classroom, issues of great and national importance to the peaceful co-existence of the society should be addressed by learners. By this, the critical and logical reasoning ability of learners (guided by the ideals, goals and objectives of the society) at tackling and addressing issues are detected, with the teachers helping to correct learners' efforts at reasoning correctly and rightly where necessary. The mind is capable of sifting, sorting impressions, and interpreting ideas. Learners will be expected to replicate this in real life situations outside the school at graduation, thus becoming critical in their thinking about social and political issues as well as activities.



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