
SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION AS A PANACEA FOR ANTI -
DEMOCRATIC VALUES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examined the place of Social Studies education in inculcating tenets of democratic values for democratic sustainability in Nigeria. The pervasiveness of the democratic principles or values such as electoral frauds, violation of human rights, inequality before the law, suppression of the minority voice, thuggery, and assassination among others were identified as the common indices in the Nigeria democratic system. This paper suggested that the Nigeria democratic environment will be secured when Social Studies instructions are largely embraced as the tools for inculcating national values of unity in diversity in our pursuit for political, social, economic and technological development. As a value laden discipline, innovations should be promoted in Social Studies teaching strategies so as to make easy the inculcation of democratic values in the citizens. Also, Social Studies professionals should review the Social Studies programmes to reflect instructions that are not limited to the four walls of the classroom in order for the uneducated citizens to imbibe the positive culture of democratic values.

Keywords: Democracy, Social Studies, democratic values, anti-democratic values.

Introduction

Democracy is a form of government that is primarily focused on the people. Its values and norms are also derived from the culture of the people from societies to societies. While the advanced democracies in European and American countries define and practice democracy on the tripod stand of justice, equity and fairness, in Africa, it is being practiced on the platform of injustice, inequality and a game of the survival of the fittest. The culture of impunity which is firmly embedded in the African culture has been at loggerhead with African version of democracy. Ake (as cited in Mezieobi & Mezieobi, 2008) affirmed that evidence abound that many African countries are yielding to the surge in demand for democratization after over a half century of authoritarian regimes which has been abysmal. Available records revealed that even among the countries that are supposedly democratizing, very few come anywhere close to being democratic.

The case is not different in Nigeria. After the successful take off of democracy by the Nigeria citizens at independence in 1960, the system had collapsed several times before the current one in practice. This is partly attributed to the culture of impunity which is embedded in our traditional and primitive form of governance before the advent of the colonial masters. The destructive role of the ethnic jingoist, religious fundamentalists, mutual suspicion among the ruling class, corruption, etc had characterized our supposed democracy. Instead of democratizing fairness, justice, transparency, accountability, economic empowerment of the citizens, etc., what we have is the 'democratization of disempowerment' characterized by the existence of weak political institutions, poor democratic culture, lack of commitment to democratic ideals such as values of free, fair and competitive elections. Corruption, nepotism, god-fatherism, electoral fraud and rigging, absence of healthy intra and inter party politics, imposition of candidates for elective positions and suppression of opposition parties are the bane of the ideal democratic values in

Nigeria. Exploring these challenges and proffering solutions to them form the fulcrum of this paper.

Democracy: The word democracy is coined from two Greek words: *demos* = people and *kratos* = rule. Therefore, the word means “rule by the people,” sometimes called “popular sovereignty.” It refers to direct, participatory and representative forms of rule by the people. In the time of the French Revolution (1789-1799), the French lawyer and political leader, Maximilien Robespierre (1758-1794), defined democracy as a “state in which the sovereign people, guided by laws of their own making, does for themselves everything that they can do well, and means of delegate everything they cannot do for themselves”. This definition affirms that democracy is a system of government in which the people are made the custodian of the authority in the system. Abraham Lincoln gave what has been widely regarded the most famous definition of democracy in his address delivered at the dedication of the Soldiers’ National Cemetery on 19 November 1863 in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. In the speech, Lincoln asserted that ‘all men are created equal’ and defined democracy as ‘government of the people, by the people, for the people’. This definition makes the people the subject and object of democracy. The people are at the epicenter of the business of democracy. All the programmes, policies, process of governance etc are to be initiated by the people, executed by the people through representation and for the benefits of the people themselves. Notwithstanding, that democracy is all about the functionality of the people in governance, there are several underpinning fundamental principles that made democracy work. Some of these principles are; the rule of law, a system of representation, Electoral system-majority rule, some degree of equality among citizens, some degree of liberty or freedom granted to or retained by citizens, Education, According the concept of “democracy encompasses variables such as the organization of free elections at regular and reasonable intervals, the independence of the judiciary, press freedom, the interest groups and political parties. These democratic values or principles are more likely to enhance

people's capacity to achieve a desired change in a society. The survival of the democratic form of government in any nation largely depends on the ability of its citizens to possess the skills, attitude, values, manifest behaviours, and understand the basic features and principles of a democratic political system. They must also be willing and able to participate in local and national politics through civic education to become properly informed about rights and obligations including participation in installing government.

How then can citizens gain the knowledge, skills, values, and behaviours that are considered necessary for a stable and effective democracy? One of the answers to this important question constitutes the main thrust of this discourse. Hence, this paper is to examine the veracity of social studies education as a process with which to jump-start the acquisition of the much-needed democratic values for a democratic political system of which every citizen of Nigeria will be the ultimate.

Social Studies: According to the Board of National Council for Social Studies, (1992), the foundation members of the organization for Social Studies educators, adopted the following definitions: the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Within the school programme, social studies provide coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences. Regina (2015), viewed Social Studies Education as a field of study that is aimed at imparting knowledge and providing valuable information necessary for life. Its basic function is geared towards helping to inculcate in the individuals' desirable social habits, attitudes and values as well as useful skills. Social Studies is primarily instituted to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse and democratic society. Social Studies education as a programme of study has the power to instill in the recipient the knowledge, skills,

values and attitude that would help him interact meaningfully, effectively and cooperatively in his social and physical environment, (Oyibe & Nnamani, 2016).

Its philosophy is largely based on maintenance of the fundamental values of a democratic living. Therefore, Social Studies has as one of its aims to correct the ills of the society and produce a better generation and a new breed of disciplined Nigerian. Exploring aforementioned challenges and proffering solutions to them with the aims of achieving the goals of Social Studies form the fulcrum of this paper.

Objectives of Social Studies

The objectives of Social Studies is centered on developing in citizens those attitudes and skills that will enable them to positively contribute to personal, local and national developments. Some of the objectives of social studies that is central to the redirecting the Nigerian citizens in shunning anti-democratic tendencies are;

- i. developing in individuals the ability to think reflectively and come to independent conclusion
- ii. inculcating in the citizens certain citizenship traits and values such as democratic beliefs
- iii. civic responsibilities, patriotism, loyalty, tolerance etc. (Falade, 2004). Therefore, if social studies is effectively taught in the Nigerian schools, it is capable of solving some of the socio – political challenges confronting the nation.

Social Studies Approach to Solving Undemocratic Principles

Social Studies as a discipline has a strong affective tone. Its curricula structure is meant to incorporate a substantial degree of programmes, which are indispensable for affective education such as honesty, justice, fairness, hardwork, obedience, contentment etc. This orientation and understanding averred to the fact that Nigerian citizens, especially the youth need the affective skills that would help them abstain from any form of anti-democratic values or principles. The principle of democracy, which includes, popular participation of citizens in the policy process, guaranteeing of

fundamental human rights and press freedom, is known as the precursor for development in every society (Adejumobi, 2004). It is obvious that some of the destructive values of democracy in Nigeria include but not limited to gangsterism, subversion of electoral processes, assassination, vote buying, imposition of candidates by the God-fathers into elective offices, trampling on citizens' right, suppression of the minority's voice, and politicization of the judicial system among others. Adeyoyin (1994) and Mezieobi (2008) agreed that social studies is value laden to teach national integration and unity. Teaching values for democratic governance via social studies instruction will be meaningful and functionally relevant to the cognition of learner when there is justice and equity in Nigeria's polity, leadership by example, if corruption is highly detested, high respect for the independence of the judiciary, curtailing of electoral violence, rigging and political murder, where religion or ethnicity do not determine ascendancy to public office (Osakwe, 2009). Some of the specific role Social Studies can play in mitigating the effect of undemocratic cultures or values in Nigeria according to Mezieobi (2008) are as follows;

Values clarification: Social Studies is a discipline that is deeply rooted in developing in learners the affective skills that are capable of making them identify and prioritizes their feelings about national issues. The position of the social studies teacher is to expose issues about the political life and political participation in Nigeria, the positive and negative experiences. Since democratic practice is a universal governmental practice, standard democratic principles have to be inculcated in the learner. This sharpens the rational intellectual energetic thinking power of the learner to assess the success of democratic governance in his country.

National interest focused instruction: While it is essential to focus on conflict generating issues in Nigeria such as religious differences, ethnic divide, corruption, poverty, marginalization amongst others in social studies instruction, the content and primary objective of the social studies curriculum and instruction should anchor on the promotion of national values for comprehensive integration of the minds and philosophies of Nigerians towards national unity.

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The use of innovation instructional methods: Social studies is value laden and could help students develop consistent democratic values and skills if effectively taught with appropriate instructional strategy (Nwaubani, 2008). Against this background, some suggested effective strategies for teaching democratic values in social studies are problem solving, reflective inquiry (Osho 1986, Fadipe, 1991). Others are discussion methods, exposure to community resources; meet the people interactive sessions, value clarification analysis and observation. The use of community resource centers that are related to Nigeria political developments should be widely used.

Intensive research on fundamental social issues: Democratic governance has to be studied practically by students through observation, inquiry, use of documentations and assessment of relevant information materials. By this exercise, the learners are sensitized to appreciate the values of democratic governance through the survey of diversified literatures. However, the limitation is that the government has always placed emphasis on funding research in science and technology as against the character education which is formulated to produce functional citizens equipped with knowledge, values, attitudes and skills that is needed to drive the yawning for technological innovations in the nation.

Conclusion

This paper has critically examined the veracity of using Social Studies Education in changing the rhetoric about anti-democratic values in Nigeria. It posited that if the positive democratic values that are desirable for the development of democracy and the nation

as a whole are well inculcated in the citizens via Social Studies Education, the immediate and remote cause of all forms of anti-democratic tendencies in Nigeria would be solved. Emphasize on collective citizens participation in decision-making, free press, fundamental human rights, an unbiased judiciary, the rule of law, curbing of corruption, and patriotic citizens will be a new order in the Nation.

Suggestions

1. Social Studies Education should be adopted as a professional field of study with the responsibility of value reorientation in Nigeria. This will afford the citizens, both within and outside the classroom to gain access to both formal and informal instructions that are desirable of democratic development in Nigeria.
2. Government should finance research in social studies education in view of its relevance in curbing the downward trends in the national values in Nigeria.
3. More Funds should be made available by the government for training and retraining of Social Studies teachers from the primary school to the University in order to make the implementation of Social Studies programmes functional and pragmatic for the citizens.
4. Effective and appropriate teaching strategies should be adopted by the Social Studies teachers in the process of inculcating democratic values in the citizens. Community resources in the form of visiting places of national interest should be well utilized.
5. More conferences, seminars, workshops and publication of democratic tenets should be regularly organized by the government and Social Studies professionals for both teachers and the political players in the nation.
6. Social Studies Curriculum should also be constantly reviewed to reflect the current needs of the nation.

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