
CONSOLIDATION OF DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA:
A TASK BEFORE SOCIAL STUDIES

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Abstract

The beauty and gains of democracy cannot be over-emphasized. In most advance democracies of the world, the “tree” of democracy keeps blossoming as the years passes by. Unfortunately, the pace of democratic development in Nigeria is rather a pitiable and pathetic one. It is illogical and underscoring that since the birth of the uninterrupted fourth republic on 29th May, 1999, Nigeria’s situation has grown more pathetic and unpalatable. The nation has negatively developed to a position where figures are simply manufactured, manipulated and announced as election results - despite the huge amount of money sent on electoral processes. These unpalatable trends necessitated this study. This paper investigated the state or level of imperfections in the practice of democracy in Nigerian polity and Nigerians’ failure in promoting true democracy. More broadly, it explores Social Studies education as a recipe for saving Nigeria’s democracy from imminent collapse. Finally, the paper proffered viable recommendations as measures in addressing Nigeria’s democratic backwardness, among others, it recommends that, since illiteracy is a major threat to democratic development,

the government should ensure that basic and adult education is free and compulsory - the essence is to totally eradicate illiteracy. Additionally, it also recommends government as a matter of urgency should place proper motivation, incentives and regards, to encourage teachers who are nation builders.

Keywords: Democracy, Social Studies Education, Constitutionalism, Rule of Law, Sustainable Democracy.

Introduction

A situation of constitution without the supporting ethos and juridical traditions of respect for the rule of law may be likened to a building without foundation. According to Akanbi and Shehu in Ossai (2013), the re-birth of democracy in Nigeria in 1999 gave the citizens hope for the practicability of the principle of the rule of law, justice and respect for human right. This was not much realized as successive administrations in the country easily violated the concept with carelessness and recklessness. Democracy transcends the forming and merging of political parties, general elections, grapple for political office and having a civilian government/ leadership in power. It is a process that involves the total and effective participation of citizens in determining policies and decisions which affect their day-to-day lives at all levels. It is based on the ability of a nation to provide channels for discussions, consultations and mobilizations. However, it is an unassailable fact that democracy as is currently practiced in Nigeria has produced unpalatable results associated with the nature of the Nigerian state and the character of the elites. Nigerian democracy has thus far tended to promote inequality rather than equality. There can be no genuine democracy in a country where citizens are grossly unequal in wealth and the poor who are invariably the majority are dependent on the wealthy (Musawa, 2014).

There is a growing awareness that for the government to govern the people well in any given society, Nigeria inclusive, there is need for the enthronement of quality education. Generally, the central task of education is to prepare learners for effective

citizenship. National development is an inevitable product of effective mass mobilization whose facilitative instrument is foundational education in all aspects of human endeavour. Although democratic development required time, man, money and material resources, it is pertinent to state that man is the pivot around which democratic development revolves. Democratic development is first and foremost requires the building of the people that make up the nation. It therefore requires essential ingredients such as love, peace, appropriate values of honesty, hard work, fairness, justice at work and at play, positive attitude of togetherness, comradeship and cooperation - these are the thrust of social studies education.

Egbule (2014) opined that social problems have impacted negatively on Nigeria developmental strides; hence, Nigeria urgently needs social studies education to address those challenges to bring about nation-building and national development. The essence of Social Studies education in Nigeria has been the promotion of national consciousness, integration, unity, national development and nation-building. It is the position of this paper to examine the indispensability Social Studies education as a viable instrument for sustaining and promoting democracy in Nigeria.

In the context of this paper, the key terms, democracy, social studies education and constitutionalism are conceptualized below. This is imperative for better comprehension of the focus of this paper. Etymologically, democracy is derived from Greek words, "Demos" which means "the people" and "kratis" which means "rule" or "government". Thus these two Greek words combined, literally means the "government by the people". Democracy is a form of government in which all eligible citizens participate equally - either directly or through elected representatives - in the proposal, development, and creation of laws. It encompasses social, economic and cultural conditions that enable the free and equal practise of political self-determination. For Rousaean cited in Nwekeaku (2014), democracy is the government of the people for the general will of the people. However, the world is more familiar with the definition of Abraham Lincoln - the great American statesman and former president. He defined democracy as government of the people, by the people, and for the people.

Although Social Studies is a victim of definitional pluralism, it is pertinent to state that Social Studies focuses on man and his interactions/contributions with/to his environment. It is an interdisciplinary field of study that integrates relevant concepts from the social sciences, arts and humanities to promote civic competence. Many Social Studies specialists have written extensively on the meaning of social studies. It is, therefore, imperative to consider some definitions of social studies, as mooted by a social scientist. One of the earliest definitions of Social Studies was given by Wesley (1950) cited in Oloya and Egbule (2017) who defined Social Studies as “those aspects or portions of the social sciences that have been selected and adapted for use in schools”. Social Studies is the outcome of man’s interaction with his different kinds of environments. Mafuyae (1992) cited in Nwalado and Obro (2010) observed that Social Studies touches the very heart of our society. It deals with the important problems of national unity and economic development of international understanding and ethnic tolerance. He further opined that Social Studies can play a major role in the successful implementation of our political goals, provide students with the skills they require for articulate citizenship, for participation in political democracy, for political literacy and for social responsibility.

According to the National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) (2005) cited in Egbule (2014), Social Studies is the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world. A wider concept of Social Studies was offered by Shiundu and Ali (2000) cited in Oloya and Egbule (2016), when they asserted that Social Studies is that part of the school activity that has to do with the teaching and learning of those socially significant problems, questions and topics believed to be relevant to the well-being of our society. Mezieobi and Birabil (2015) defines Social Studies as a formative school instruction designed to equip learners with desirable attitudes, values, skills and knowledge for cohesive social existence in the society.

The term “constitutionalism” simply means adherence to the principles laid down in the constitution. It means adherence to constitutional procedures and provisions. It is derived from the term, “constitution”. Constitution itself has been variously defined. According to Ibezim cited in Egbule (2019) constitution is a body of rules and regulations which shows the structure of government as well as describing the rights and duties of the citizens. Constitutionalism is simply conceptualized as the supremacy of the constitution. It is described as the belief that a government’s authority is dictated by a specific law or group of laws – a constitution. This paper therefore examined the state or level of imperfections in the practice of democracy in Nigerian polity and Nigerians’ failure in promoting true democracy. In specific terms, this paper examined the philosophy, goals and objectives of Social Studies in Nigeria; assessed the pitiable state of Nigeria’s democracy and further gave a recipe for saving Nigeria’s democracy from imminent collapse. Each of this is given a comprehensive review in this paper.

The Philosophy of Social Studies in Nigeria

Social Studies philosophy is to enable its learners to become nationally conscious, better informed and effective citizens. The inculcation of national consciousness, national unity and imbibing cultural values, skills, attitudes, abilities can contribute to national unity and development. Social Studies curriculum content emphasizes positive attitudes and values as well as hard work, diligence, co-operation, participation, honesty, self-reliance etc as against such socio-physiological defective behaviour as self-centeredness, which is inimical to national integration and development.

The philosophy of Social Studies forms part and parcel of the philosophy of Nigerian education. The overall objectives of Nigerian education have been stated earlier. According to the National Policy on Education, Nigeria’s philosophy of education is based on the integration of the individuals into a sound and effective citizens, with equal education opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Makinde (1980) cited in

Ukadike (2003) states that the philosophy of Social Studies is embedded in the philosophy of Nigerian education. He stated further that the he philosophy of Social Studies both at the primary and secondary school levels is as follows:

- i. To enable its learner to become nationally conscious, better informed, and effective citizens;
- ii. The inculcation of national consciousness and national unity;
- iii. Imbibing the right type of values and attitudes for self and national survival;
- iv. The acquisition of necessary skills, abilities and to contribute to national development;
- v. To ensure the acquisition of relevant knowledge which is an essential pre-requisite to personal development as well as a positive personal contribution to the betterment of mankind; and
- vi. To develop in children, a positive attitude to citizenship and a desire in them to make a positive personal contribution to the creation of a united Nigeria.

Goals and Objectives of Social Studies Curriculum in Nigeria

The uniqueness of Social Studies as a discipline of study in the school system places it at a vantage position to contribute substantially towards the realization of Nigeria's educational goals. Social Studies, according to Osakwe (2010), through its curricular offering, provide young people with the opportunity for nurturing the virtues of self-realization, better human relationship, self and national economic efficiency, effective citizenship, national consciousness, national unity, social and political advancement, and scientific and technological development. Since Social Studies is an integrative field of study and Nigeria is a political and cultural amalgam, the subject offers itself as a veritable vehicle for propelling the nation towards the achievement of her educational goals, the realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Education For All (EFA) goals and, hence, national integrated development.

In fact, the ultimate goal of Social Studies education in Nigeria is to advance the process of self- realization, better human relationship, effective citizenship, human rights, and national consciousness among Nigerians. Social studies is geared towards building individuals and the nation (Osakwe & Itedjere, 2005). The world is constantly undergoing changes and Social Studies remains a veritable instrument for examining these changes, whether they be positive or negative. According to Osakwe (2009), Social Studies examine issues and problems from a holistic viewpoint. A number of objectives have been stated for various subjects. Based on the national aims and objectives of education, the general objectives of Social Studies education in Nigeria are stated, according to Osunde (1989) in Ukadike (2003) to include the following:

- i. Create an awareness and understanding of our evolving social and physical environment as a whole in its natural man-made cultural and spiritual resources together with the rational use and conservation of these resources for national development;
- ii. Develop a capacity to learn and to acquire certain basic skills including not only those of listening, speaking, reading and writing and of calculation, but also those skills of hand and head, together with those of observation, analysis and inference which are essential to the forming of sound social, economic and political judgment;
- iii. Ensure the acquisition of that relevant body of knowledge and information which is an essential pre-requisite for personal development as well as for a positive personal contribution to the betterment of mankind;
- iv. Develop a sympathetic appreciation of the diversity and interdependence of all members of the local community and the wider national and international community;
- v. Develop in students positive attitudes of togetherness, comradeship and co-operation towards a healthy nation: the inculcation of appropriate values of honesty, integrity, hard work, fairness and justice at work and play as one's contribution to the development of the nation;

- vi. Promotion of an understanding of the social problems of their locality and finding possible solutions to them;
- vii. Development of the ability to think reflectively and come to independent conclusions;
- viii. Creation of awareness that discipline is essential for an orderly society; and
- ix. Demonstration of flexibility and a willingness to accept necessary changes within a system, i.e. education, government or law, for the good of all.

These objectives according to Osunde (1989) cited in Ukadike (2003), were developed to solve specific and national problems. They are also aimed at exposing the learners to the problems in the society and equipping them with the necessary skills needed for their survival.

The Pitiabale State of Nigeria's Democracy

Nigeria operates a democratic, constitutional republic and presidential system of government. There are many "confusions" in Nigerian democratic system. The questions we should rather ask are: Does Nigeria's democracy protect the rights of minorities and, especially, the individual? Is it characterized by fair, free and competitive elections, a separation of powers into different arms of government, independent judiciary, the rule of law in everyday life, and equal protection of human persons? Has it enhanced the living standard of the ordinary people and equipped Nigeria to participate actively in world economy and body polity? A straight "Yes" or "No" answer won't do justice to any of these questions. Democracy is built on the equality of citizens, the freedom of these citizens to associate with one another for the realization of their ideals and the defense and promotion of their interests, the freedom of these citizens to choose between the different political platforms of various political parties and candidates, and see to the actualization of the platforms they have voted for, if their choices win. But in Nigeria, people have effectively been disenfranchised by their own circumstances on the one hand, and their leaders' perfidy

on the other. As a result, Nigeria is approaching a situation where democracy is being practiced without democrats and elections are being conducted without regard for the electorate –most of their votes are not counted. The ballot is not respected by the government and the price of protecting it is too high for the people to pay; but the bullet, once universally feared, is now generally out of fashion (Musa, 2012).

So, gleaning from the above, is Nigeria really practicing true democracy today? According to Kokori (2007), Nigeria is a country with a history of electoral fraud and wholesome malpractices. Is it not an incontrovertible fact that Nigeria has never witnessed a truly free, fair and credible election since her independence in 1960 except the annulled June 12, 1993 general elections? That election was adjudged by almost all Nigerians including both local and international poll observers as the freest and fairest ever conducted in Nigeria. Even recent elections conducted since this new dispensation in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 were all fraught with monumental election malpractices (like inflation of figures, snatching and destruction of ballot papers and boxes, the use of thugs, inadequate and late arrival of electoral materials, intimidation of opponents, fighting, killing of innocent souls (electorates), insecurity, corrupt electoral officials, god fatherism, and so on. Favoritism and political god fatherism are the major threats to democracy in Nigeria. The system where an incumbent president or governor says that only Mr. “X” or “Y” will succeed him, “anointed candidates” without any primaries, will not foster democratic system. Some top Nigerian politicians see election or victory in an election as “do or die” affair. This is more of monarchism and does not augur well for Nigerian nascent democracy. The implication of the above is that political representation and governance is not people centered and this of course is antithetical to democratic stability, because for democracy or democratic governance to endure, it must be built on the people. Following the spates of removal or “impeachment” of some state governors through unconstitutional means, Senator Rashidi Ladoja, former Governor of Oyo State, himself a victim, challenged the legality of his removal by some legislators in the court of law. The

court of Appeal pitched its tent on the side of the constitution and help that the removal of the Governor by factional members of the Legislative House in an unauthorized place (D' Rovans Hotel, Ring Road, Ibadan) and without due compliance with the provisions of section 188 of the 1999 constitution was unconstitutional, null and void. The most recent cases is the impeachment and attempt of impeachment of Governors Murtala Nyako and Alhaji Tanko Al-Makura of Adamawa and Nasarawa states respectively. It is not an over statement, therefore, to state that constitutionalism or supremacy of the constitution has never been in doubt or questionable in Nigeria, and the failure to adhere to constitutional provisions renders whatever was done contrary to it, unconstitutional (Egbule & Mezieobi, 2015).

Between 2005 – 2007, five state governors were impeached by their respective State Houses of Assembly. The only unifying factor of these impeachments was that none could be said to have followed due process. They were all removed without having regard to constitutional provisions. For instance, in Ekiti State the former Governor Mr. Ayodele Fayose was removed without following due procedure; this eventually led to the declaration of a state of emergency by the then President Olusegun Obasanjo. In Oyo State, Mr. Rasheed Ladoja was impeached by 18 members of the House of Assembly at D'Rovan Hotel, Ring Road, Ibadan instead of the approved place of sitting of the house. This was notwithstanding the fact that the members were not up to the constitutional mandated two-thirds of the house. Mr Joshua Dariye of Plateau State had his own share of the illegality perpetrated during this period. He was removed by eight of the twenty four members of the Plateau State House of Assembly (Asalu, 2012) cited is (Oloya, 2015).

In 2017, the EFCC raid on an empty apartment in Ikoyi, a highbrow Lagos neighborhood, turned up bundles of cash in dollar, pound sterling and naira currencies totaling \$43.4 million. While the agency is yet to identify the owner of the apartment, a Federal High Court in Lagos has ordered a temporary forfeiture of the money. The discovery, thanks to a tip under Nigeria's whistle blowing policy, has shocked many Nigerians who, given the many cases of

corruption that come up in the country, are not easily taken aback by discoveries of this type. However, Nigeria has focused on tackling its corruption problem through a new whistle-blower policy and it seems to be paying off. The policy, approved by president Buhari, encourages Nigerians to report corruption-related offenses. As an incentive, if ill-gotten funds are successfully recovered, whistle-blowers stand to receive between 2.5%-5% of the recovered amount (Egbule, 2019). Rarely any institution in Nigeria is corruption free. Nigeria is a country with a history of electoral fraud and unwholesome practices. Corruptions in electoral process are visible in various forms of irregularities, ranging from inadequate electoral materials, fake electoral materials, snatching of ballot boxes, bribing the electorates and electoral officials, fighting and destruction of lives and properties before, during and after elections, to the use of armed thugs by politicians. A system where an incumbent President or Governor insists on a particular candidate to succeed him in office and actualize it at party primaries and elections - cannot be categorized as a liberal democracy. The election process had often turned to selection processes in party hierarchy. A situation where politicians see winning an election as a “do or die” affair is not healthy Nigeria’s nascent democracy.

According to Nwekeaku (2014), since Nigerian’s political independence on October 1, 1960, successive regimes have canvassed for the government based on the principles of the rule of law and democracy. Nigeria has elaborate provisions on the rule of law and democracy for the ultimate existence of good governance. For example, in the opening paragraph of the 1979 Nigerian constitution as consolidated in the 1999 constitution, it is clearly stated thus: “We the people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria have firmly adopted this document for the purpose of promoting the good government and welfare of all persons in our country on the principles of freedom, equality and justice, and for the purpose of consolidating the unity of our people”. Section (1) of both the 1979 and the 1999 constitutions provides that this “constitution is supreme and its provisions shall have binding force on all authorities and persons throughout the Federal Republic of Nigeria”. The constitution makes elaborate provisions for the

promotion and protection of the fundamental human rights as contains in sections 33, 34, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, and 45 among others.

Saving Nigeria's Democracy from Collapse: What Role can Social Studies Education Play?

As in instrument of change, Social Studies education received by students change their attitudes to life and fellow human beings, superstitious beliefs, several of forms sentiments (ethnic loyalty, religious fanaticism and so on) and several acceptable social norms that exists in the society. Social Studies education is capable of eliminating tribal affiliation and inculcating the spirit of nationhood. Some concepts in social studies education like moral, peace, religious, environmental, conflict management education, etc have the potential of teaching the populace the need for tolerance and to live together with others. These concepts encourage citizens to understand the necessity of appreciating the reality of life and adopt positive measures in resolving personal and interpersonal problems, proper manifestations of fairness in one's personal dealings with others in the various works of life, at home, office, and community. Knowledge acquired through Social Studies education would enable the Nigerian students in their early formative age to have a better understanding of the ethnic composition of their nation, and the link between and among them, and the benefits of living and working as a nation and undermining ethnic sentiments (Arisi, 2011).

Social Studies philosophy is to enable its learners become nationally conscious, better informed and effective citizens. The inculcation of national consciousness, national unity and imbibing cultural values, skills, attitudes, abilities can contribute to national unity and development. Social Studies curriculum content emphasis positive attitudes and values as a hard work, diligence, co-operation, participation, honesty, self-help etc as against such socio-physiological defective behaviour as self-centeredness, which is inimical to national security and democratic development.

Social Studies education has the potential of contributing meaningfully to the democratic development of Nigeria in making

a wealthier, safer and more secured Nigeria, if the discipline and its teachers are appropriately given their rightful place in the quest for democratic development.. Social Studies education is one of the ways of developing human capital to facilitate national development. It has as its major purpose: the promotion of civic competence, integration of knowledge skills and attitudes in solving societal problems and challenges (Osakwe, 2010). Social Studies is a problem-solving discipline, that is geared, not only to open up the problems of development, but attempts of proffering solutions to developmental challenges.

Social Studies education is very vital in offering lessons on developing that sense of tolerance, national pride, and understanding of the Nigerian diverse groups and thus inculcates in the citizens the idea of patriotism, inter-group relations and unity in diversity (Enem, 1999). The issues of democratic development are multidisciplinary in nature and so, understanding them and developing resolutions to them require multidisciplinary subject. The quest for democratic development, therefore, should begin with having responsible citizens who are ready to contribute to the growth and development of the society. Social Studies is known for the teaching of morals, honesty, values, norms, citizenship education, religious tolerance and so on.

Social Studies as a value-laden subject has the capacity to build sound morals and integrity in all facets of the society. It serves as aid to changing the value system, the people and as a means of re-appraising undue obsession to materialism and primitive wealth accumulation which is the mania that is somehow responsible for corrupt practices in the society which invariably thwart democratic development. According to Osakwe (2009) Social Studies examine issues and problems from a holistic viewpoint. He further stated that social studies education is an avenue for providing young people with a feeling of hope in the future and confidence in their ability to solve the social, political and environmental problems of individuals, their community, state or nation.

Democratic development is anchored on advocacy for re-orientation which can be made possible through a process of mass education. Through mass education advocacy and mobilization,

members of the society are brought together with a new consciousness gained from acquiring higher cognitive orientation on political system, symbols and events. This will build solidarity and ginger integration and a sense of togetherness or oneness among members of the society, fostering a sense of nation-hood even when such did not exist (Bassey, 2015).

Conclusion

Social Studies education is a field of study that instills in students the knowledge, skill, attitudes and actions that are considered important in the relationship and interaction of man and those around him. The paper argued that effective teaching and learning of Social Studies education can proffer solution to the challenges of democratic development in Nigeria. The intellectual analysis in this paper firmly established the fact that there is a positive correlation between social studies and democratic development. Democratic practices can only flourish in an environment which political elites possess the required leadership skills and ready to allow the constitution and the principle of the rule of law to take pre-eminence. I express optimism that, if strict adherence is been taking to implement the recommendations made in this paper, Social Studies education will impart in the learners the critical reasoning that would help them as better planners and decision makers in management, administration and effective participation in politics.

Way Forward

For Nigerians to attain true democracy and reap the dividends of democracy, the suggestions below are indispensable and should be strictly adhered to:

Relevant social/mass mobilization agencies should embark on massive voters' education campaign to sensitize and educate the citizenry on various electoral reforms, especially the National Orientation Agency (NOA).

Since illiteracy is a major threat to democratic development, the government should ensure that basic and adult education is free and compulsory-the essence is to totally eradicate illiteracy.

Government as a matter of urgency should place proper motivation, incentives and regards, to encourage Social Studies teachers who are nation builders.

Provision and maintenance of educational infrastructure, as well as consistent training and development of education personnel (teachers and managers) in the light of modern global challenges is imperative.

Education should be adequately funded to enhance conducive learning. Its annual budgetary allocation should be reviewed and increased to align with the 26% UNESCO's recommendation.

Social Studies curriculum should be re-structured to incorporate concepts like good governance, entrepreneurship education, security education, and media education.

Government at all tiers should be willing to allocate huge sum of money to finance the law enforcement and anti-corruption agencies for optimal performance.

Enlightenment programmed on the need for democratic development in our institutions of learning, the mass media, homes, churches, mosques, communities, local, state and national assemblies, to educate and sensitize Nigerians on the need for national unity and nation building.

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