

Social Studies Education As An Instrument For Building Sustainable Democratic Values In Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper deliberated primarily on the place of social studies education in inculcating democratic values for democratic sustainability in Nigeria. It further examined the essence of democracy in nation building and pitfalls of democratic governance in Nigeria which are: disintegrative nationalism, ethnicity, fraudulent elections, political instability, mismanagement of public funds, others are non-independent judiciary, non-adherence to public opinion, faulty policy implementation and accountability, including party interference and dominant class influences.

Introduction

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. Nation building is a complex issue in a multi-ethnic society as Nigeria. Ethnic attachment and inclination is ingrained in Africa's cultural values. Against this background, Asoegwu (2007:68) remarked "...some aspects of (our) culture that do not synchronize with the speed of human development, need to be adjusted for our own good". The modern age calls for restructuring of retrogressive values towards objectivity, justice, transparency, resourcefulness and patriotism as sustainable behaviour for building a democratic nation.

The bedrock of any stable and functional democratic state is the electoral process (Osakwe 2009). Election results in Nigeria are hardly acceptable because of doctoring of election results, corruption, open

rigging, perversion of justice and thuggery. The subject of (democratic instability) is even more pertinent to Nigeria and indeed Africa as a whole where misrule and repression accompanied by gross human right violations have become an intractable problem over the decades (Sokefun, Oyakhiromen, Ige and Obayemi, 2008).

The objectives of social studies education in the universities is to transform Nigeria society through youth imbued with acceptable values, attitudes, skills and intellectual power for national reconstruction development and unity (Mezieobi, 2007). Ideally teaching democratic values in social studies instruction in Nigerian universities is one of the crucial means of equipping the learner with attitudes, political socialization, patriotic feelings and consciousness to transform the political landscape of Nigeria for sustainable and viable democratic stability. Social studies education is apt in inculcating positive values in the learner in the bid to grooming human resources for achieving sustainable democratic growth, development and political stability in Nigeria. Democratic order and discipline is rooted in the cultural behaviour of the people. Adeyoyin (1994) confirms that social studies education is value laden in content for meaningful political education reorientation and redirection of attitudes of Nigerians towards transparency, objectivity and accountability in political conduct and participation.

This paper for lucid interpretation of the ensuing discourse intends to examine: Democracy and nation building, pitfalls of democratic governance in Nigeria and the place of social studies education in inculcating democratic values.

Conceptual framework

Social studies, democracy, democratic values and nation building are relevant concepts to be analyzed. Social studies education is an innovative course of instruction geared at focusing education that is reflective of Nigerian's social, political, technological, economic and physical environment (Mezieobi, 2008). 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 and environmental problems of individuals, their community, state or nation (Osakwe, 2009). This underscores the essence of inculcating patriotic values in the learner through social studies instruction, which will add in equipping the learner

further with the feeling of national consciousness, cooperative attitude and the realization that a formidable progressive Nigeria society will be hinged on citizens who relish in national unity through commitment, transparency, accountability and qualitative democratic operational processes not inhibited by ethnic sentiments biases.

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 accepting and participating in positive social actions geared towards the progressive development of the society.

Democracy...has to do with the active participation of the people and indeed all groups in all facets of national life (Yoroms, 1994:40). Furthermore, democracy means a governmental system which is based on popular election and representation. Supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them or their elected or nominated representatives (Olisa, et al. 1990). In a democracy, there is supremacy of the people, representation and popular participation. In simple term a democratic government is an open administration, directed by the choice, aspiration and welfare of the masses. It is a government accountable to the people. Democratic governments are established through the mandate of the people. Therefore sustainable operations of democracy in a polity are guided by standard principles, laws and values which must be exercised by the people.

The inculcation of democratic values through social studies instruction is essential for achieving effective nation building and social stability in Nigeria. Sustainable democratic operations are guided by principles, rules, transparency and objectivity. Against this back ground, Agu (1994) remarked that social stability is paramount in a country where citizens agree on crucial democratic values. To buttress the foregoing discussion, Mkpá (1997) observed that social studies education is enriched in content to expose and enlighten the learner with democratic cherished values and culture. The democratization drive in contemporary Nigeria aims at the establishment of democratic values geared towards the increased participation of the populace in decision making. Accordingly democratization is dependent on the expansion of societal values and structures to facilitate increased participation in the exercise of state power (Attahir & Dunmoye, 1994).

Adeyoyin (1994) adds that values are standards of perception which is personal and social. Social values tend to be embracive and show the feelings, ideas and beliefs of people towards concepts, actions and

events. Democratic political values are guided by laid down constitutional principles, rules and law. The essence is to enthrone regular standard practice of democracy and to obviate anarchy in the quest to grab political power and dispense state decisions. Values are acceptable societal culture and principles for inter-relationships. Democratic values in the context of this discourse are acceptable political behaviour which enhance democratic operations and its sustainability, they are: patriotism, transparency, justice, derive for excellence, loyalty, national interest, national integration, public service, honesty, national feeling, national consciousness, rights sensitization awareness, good conduct of election, acceptance of upright election results and civilized conducts for national development building.

Esedebe (2003) pointed out that nation building is complex, concerns economic development and integration of ethnic groups in a polity so as to have viable and sustainable democratic system. Mezieobi and Mezieobi (2008) maintained that nation building is a complex concept; its conceptualization depends on country's goals, aspirations and needs. What is substantial is that nation building is geared at promoting political, economic, social and technological stability of nations. It is a process of improving the democratic process, social relations and welfare of the citizens. However, it is paramount that democratic order and democratic values promote social stability, sustainable development and sustainable solutions to national tasks and problems which are pre-conditions for effective nation building and political stability.

Democracy and nation building

To crave for democracy is now the vogue in Africa Authoritarian political regimes are increasingly being challenged by local social forces to open up for democratic reforms (Abdullahi, 1994). Sustainable democracy in Nigeria will assist progressive nation building in the following ways:

National integration: Based on reviewed literatures positions, one of the problems confronting developing nations is the integration of various ethnic groups in a polity. Democratic stability is hardly achieved in the midst of social upheaval, mistrust, political disorder and insensitivity to patriotic feeling. One of the gains of acquiring democratic values is the promotion of national integration in a multi-ethnic society with cultural and religious divide impediments. Democratic values acquisition equip the citizens with the skills of tolerance, accommodation and appreciation

of the relevance of peaceful co-existence in national development, these are credible conditions for democratic growth and sustainability.

Peace and social stability: Harmonious co-existence in a multi-ethnic society is very instrumental to achieving social stability. Democratic education enlightens the mind above mediocrity, sentiments and undue inclination to cheap virtues as religion and ethnic rapport in the election of citizens to man the state of affairs of a state. The international system cherishes men of ideas, intellectual quality and vision to transform their country's political landscape for progressive development of human and material resources.

Dividends of democracy: Democratic government is not unduly autocratic; the representatives of the people contribute substantially in formulating national laws and policies, by extension the people are empowered in the management of national affairs with wide latitude of freedom of expression of their ideas, opinions and thoughts in crucial national issues. Thus, Egboh (2001:347) commented "in a democracy, authority is derived from the consent of the governed". This is one of the ways of attaining the status of a modern democratic nation. There is in addition visible protection of human rights, national order, relative peace, coordinated national planning of political and economic programmes, transparency and accountability in national life.

Social progress: A democratic nation is internationally acknowledged respected and recognized. Democratic environment opens room for progressive development, economic improvement, political socialization and social advancement of the citizens. Countries transact trade and invest in democratic nations. For instance, the long military rule in Nigeria did not attract massive international democratic support and investment opportunities as to be compared with the present political stature of Nigeria in a democratic civil era for the past ten years. In corroborating the preceding comment, it was observed that during military undemocratic regimes that Nigeria's economic destabilization according to Ogunna (2003:49) are "exacerbated by economic mismanagement, deficit budgeting and heavy debt burden, when all these economic problems affect a political system in great intensity and persistence, the situation tends to produce grave economic distress, disaster and political

instability". Democratic environment and relative social order in a polity stimulate sustainable social progress.

Infrastructural development: Military rule in all its forms, is not meant for civilized human beings. No matter how well governed a military government could be, it can never be better than a bad elected people's government (Ogunna, 2003). Democratic regimes in Nigeria facilitate socio-economic infrastructural development for purposes of accountability and a ticket for re-election and means to restore public confidence that the political players are responsive to the needs and aspirations of the populace who vote them into government. Competitive development at the grassroots, state and central government is one of the evident democratic dividends in Nigeria's body politic.

Pitfalls of democratic governance in Nigeria

Disintegrative nationalism: The political history of Nigeria is dominantly characterized by disintegrative nationalism which refers to the inclination towards sectional consciousness, due to perhaps the fragmentation of the nation into several nationalities at the detriment of National allegiance, integration and stability (Ukadike, 1999:18). It is through the acquisition of democratic values that citizens can be re-orientated to think and feel that Nigeria is a united entity irrespective of her different ethnic nationalities. National consciousness and patriotism is stimulated through unity of purpose and collective actions of citizens that constitute a nation state. National goals of building a stable state of Nigeria, where the social rights of citizens are respected and their freedom of life is ensured without oppression, cannot thrive without democratic order.

Ethnicity: Democratic operations in Nigeria are criticized by observable leadership bias, in appointments, employment and distribution of national resources. Ethnicity has continued to affect both civil and military governance in Nigeria. Best (2001) has described ethnicity as the bane of Nigerian politics. Furthermore, Akpekpe (1996:176) remarked

“Democracy, the free and open competition for peoples votes is simply not visible in an environment of intense ethnic preferences”. Nigerians should deemphasize inclination to ethnicism and embrace leadership based on sound transparency, accountability and determined effort to achieve national unity and social cohesion.

Fraudulent elections: Olisa, et al (1990) posited that democracy is not working in a pure perfect form anywhere in the world. In the case of Nigeria, elections are massively rigged and its results doctored. A vivid case in point is the newspapers reports inundated with election results nullified by the courts, specifically the 2007 election in Nigeria.

Political instability: The institutionalization of stable democracy in Nigeria political scenario is frustrated by personal, ethnic, political and military interventions and crises civil rule hardly last without military intervention. Ikelegbe (1995:2000) reports that “Nigeria became independent with a blossoming but problematic parliamentary democracy”. At present, the democratic situation in Nigeria is progressively being nurtured to stability.

Mismanagement of public funds: Corruption is a house hold word with reference to political activities and governance. Those at the corridors of power amass wealth meant for the development of the polity at all levels of political administration in Nigeria. This anomaly has attracted the attention of eminent Nigerians; especially Anyim (2001) who remarked that democratic freedom should be managed and not abused in the management of national resources in order not to generate insecurity.

Non-independent judiciary: A democratic government is established with unbiased independent judiciary, which protects the citizens from the oppression of the ruled and fellow citizens in Nigeria, the appointment of Judges is directly influenced by the executives. The Executive heads have often used their power to appoint persons known to support their policies. However, in the present dispensation the Judiciary is commended for annulling some spurious election results in Nigeria, while some escaped unrevised.

Non-adherence to public opinion: Most civilian governments operate as military rulers. In short, our democratic structure had been militarized;

governors and head of state remove commissioners and ministers from their duty positions, without deliberations and consultation with the House of Assemblies or National Assembly. According to Darcathy in Ogunna (2003) without adequate stimulus from critics, government can be slack and complacent or even corrupt". Constructive criticisms and acceptance of quality opinions guide democratic governance and direct the formulation of public policies.

Faulty policy implementation: good packaged programmes are poorly implemented including public policies. For example, the 6-3-3-4 system of education wars on corruption, Universal Basic Education are haphazardly implemented. Worse still, public expenditures are not made public for consumption, scrutiny and criticism. Public officers in government give procedural account of their office operations and explanation in the use of financial and material resources entrusted in them, this is accountability. The scenario in Nigeria is that most executives are shy to run open administration and account for their activities.

Party interference and dominant class influence: Political parties dominantly interfere with the operations of the local government chairmen, governors and the Head of state. They pressure for political patronage like the award of contracts, employment, influencing of state policies amongst others. Again, the rich take advantage of their power and wealth to influence political decisions and public policies, the lower class is exploited, manipulated and made spectators of the political scenario.

The place of social studies education in inculcating democratic values

Values clarification: One of the ways of inculcating democratic values in social studies students is by helping students identify their feelings and priorities about certain environmental issues (Sidney, et al., 1972). 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 conflict generating issues in Nigeria 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. Adeyoyin (1994), Mkpa (2001) and Mezieobi (2008) agree 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). In other words the existing negative social issues in the Nigerian society may go a long way to work against value education projected and inculcated by social studies education.

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 method, exposure to community resources; meet the people interactive session, value clarification analysis and observation.

However, Obemeata (1983) and Obebe (2005) condemn the over use of expository method because it is teacher dominated, limits students participation in learning, emphasis is merely on acquisition of factual knowledge and information which inhibits potentials for acquisition and promotion of desirable values, attitudes and skills which are germane for the effective implementation of social studies curriculum.

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 government places emphasis on funding researches in science and technology as against social studies which is formulated to produce functional citizens equipped with knowledge, values, attitudes and skills for societal development and rehabilitation (Mezieobi, 2008). Intensive social studies research is a process of learning how to learn.

Recommendations

1. Our democratic environment will be credible and fortified when a greater majority of Nigerians are sensitized through social studies instruction to accept unity across ethnic divides and unity in diversity in their pursuit of national political, social, economic and technological matters.
2. Government should finance research in social studies education in view of its relevance to political socialization.
3. Innovative strategies should be adopted in the teaching of social studies so as to inculcate democratic values in learners.
4. Social studies lecturers of Nigerian universities should through conferences, seminars, workshops and publications extend democratic values content of social studies instruction to the Nigerian public.
5. Social studies lecturers of Nigerian universities should be professionally trained in order to make the implementation of social studies functional and pragmatic for society use.
6. Integration of the consequences of youth restiveness and violence education into social studies curriculum will offer learner experience for the acquisition of desirable attitudes, values and knowledge for achieving sustainable democratic development in Nigeria (Nwanna-Nzewunwa and Mezieobi, 2008).

Conclusion

Democratic stability and governance is achievable in a polity through the acquisition of democratic values. Social studies education by the composition of its curriculum in Nigerian Universities is apt to inject democratic values for democratic sustainability through intense political socialization of the youth who are the present and future managers of state affairs. Effective nation building in Nigeria anchors on national stability

and consciousness, collective patriotism, unity and transparent democratic governance. For instance the 2008 presidential election has proved to the world the potency of America's democracy, with their leadership choice focused on candidates' content of quality, consideration for national interest against racial divides.

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