



FUNCTIONAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION AND THE CHALLENGES OF DEMOCRACY AND NATIONAL UNITY IN NIGERIA

BY

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Abstract

This paper examines functional citizenship education as a powerful weapon for addressing the challenges of democracy and national unity in Nigeria. Democracy and national unity are crucial aspects of achieving greatness as a nation. Citizenship education involves instilling moral values, skills, and attitudes in citizens to raise their awareness of the importance of obeying constituted authority and utilizing their abilities to tackle the challenges of democracy and national development. Functional citizenship education helps people adopt patriotic beliefs and refrain from engaging in activities such as terrorism, insurgency, religious violence/intolerance, armed robbery, kidnapping, election rigging/violence, and other issues that undermine the country's continued existence. This paper argues that functional citizenship education provides an effective means of mitigating the challenges faced by democracy and national unity. The findings of the paper reveal that ineffective citizenship education in Nigeria poses a serious threat to democracy and national unity. As a recommendation, the paper suggests the intensification of citizenship education at all levels of Nigeria's educational system. Additionally, it proposes using this educational tool to re-orientate public office holders as well as individuals at the grassroots level. By enhancing citizenship education, Nigeria can address the challenges it faces in terms of democracy and national unity.

Keywords: Challenges; citizenship education; democracy; functional; national unity

Introduction

Nations, especially developing ones like Nigeria, face numerous challenges in fulfilling their duties as sovereign entities. Potter (2004:2) states that "democratic states continuously strive to formulate strategies and national objectives aimed at



supplying a variety of political and non-political upsides for the well-being of their inhabitants. These national objectives typically encompass democratic governance, security, and national unity, which provide a foundation for the development of other essential infrastructure such as transportation and communications.

The state must deliver commodities and services that guarantee the welfare, protection, and well-being of its population in order to accomplish these national goals (Francis, 1993). The majority of nations prioritize ensuring security as their top priority among these objectives. To do this, a secure environment must be established, and legitimate, effective security forces must be deployed to safeguard civilians from both internal and external dangers, preventing crime, and enabling citizens to resolve disagreements with the state and fellow citizens through non-violent means.

In modern democracies, citizenship education plays a vital role in garnering people's assistance and encouraging their involvement in governmental matters. Citizenship education aims to instill in people democratic values, ethics, and principles as well as a knowledge of how democratic institutions operate. It tries to inform voters about their rights and duties while they participate in politics.

The goal of functional citizenship education is to provide people the knowledge and abilities they need to participate fully in society. Through this process, citizens are taught moral principles that are essential to the development of a strong civil society, such as tolerance, equality, and justice. Increasing citizens' capacity, awareness, and knowledge they become more informed and actively engage in political issues. This process also enhances the level of patriotism among the citizens. Citizenship education instills in individuals a sense of responsibility to protect public property, uphold the law, and refrain from actions that jeopardize democratic governance and the well-being of the nation. Examples of such actions include corruption, robbery, kidnapping, militancy, political thuggery, electoral violence, and other acts that undermine the state. However, these are not the only examples. More importantly, functional citizenship education plays a crucial role in mobilizing citizens to support their government's efforts in achieving its goals. It ensures that citizens are effectively mobilized to react and respond in an appropriate manner to government activities. By promoting a strong sense of civic duty, citizenship education fosters a collective responsibility among citizens to actively engage in the betterment of their society and support the government's initiatives. (Chidozie & Virtua, 2018)

Concept of Education and Citizenship Education

The term education means different things to different people, culture and society. Okoorosaye and Orubite (2019) viewed education as a social creation, calved out to meet the specific needs of the society at any particular point in time. Similarly,



Adelowo (2010) captured education to mean an enterprise that is set out to instill values, attitude, and skills in members of the society. In the same vein, Pauley and Buseri (2019) conceptualised education as a socialization agent that equips all its beneficiaries with the necessary tools such as knowledge, skills, attitude, cultural values, language and social skills to enable them conform to the expected demands of their society. Nzewu cited in Birabil and Ogeh, (2020) perceived education to play an important role in preparing or nurturing individuals on how to live in the society and thus being able to perform specific functions for society. In addition, Okoh cited in Kayode and Adagba (2014) stated three ways of using the term education, thus: firstly, education as a process, which is the activity of preserving, developing and transmitting the culture of a people from one generation to another. It is an activity of continuous all – round development of individual for life in the society. Secondly, education can be used as a product, which refers to the change whether overt or covert, implicit or explicit, which education is supposed to bring about. In this vein, Okoh contends that the end product of education is supposed to be the “educated man” who has the intellectual and moral strength to make the world a better place to live in. And finally, education as a discipline is perceived as a body of systematic and organized knowledge. From the above definitions, education can be conceptualized as the process of teaching, training and learning in schools and colleges for the development of knowledge and skills so as to prepare and equip the individuals to live happily with themselves and others in the society. This means that education is a powerful instrument of change and the main vehicle for the development of any nation. However, citizenship refers to an individual's membership in a political entity, which can be a village, town, city, state, or country. This political identity establishes a reciprocal relationship between the individual and their nation. As a citizen, one enjoys certain rights and privileges but is also expected to fulfill certain duties and obligations to the state. Education, on the other hand, is the process of imparting desired knowledge, skills, and attitudes to individuals. It involves a well-structured body of knowledge that encompasses various disciplines or subjects taught in schools, while citizenship education involves a well-designed body of knowledge that helps citizens develop a sense of self-discipline and a positive attitude towards their nation. It provides citizens with the opportunity to contribute positively to the development, sustainability, and well-being of their country. Citizenship education can be seen as a deliberate and progressive process that aims to free, protect the inhabitants of a community from naivety and give them the necessary training, as well as a good political, economic, social, and administrative conscience. While Ukegbu, Adebayo and Anyaoha, (2011) define citizenship education as encompassing the entirety of educational programs that impart knowledge and skills to individuals, with the goal of instilling moral goodness and readiness to provide honest service to their homeland.



Citizenship education plays a crucial role in inculcating good values and attitudes that foster patriotism towards one's country. It ensures that individuals from all walks of life receive education about their rights, duties, and the government's obligations to the people. There is a strong relationship between democracy and citizenship education, as democracy promotes mass participation in governance. Active citizen participation requires a conscious and comprehensive education of citizens regarding the methods voting patterns, levels of engagement, the form of government, and other pertinent concerns all have an impact on how people interact with their leaders.

Functional Citizenship Education

Functional citizenship education is more holistic, meaningful and most desirable and it is relevant to the present and expected needs, problems and desires of the individuals, which is based on the occurrence and changes in their cultural perception. It is the type of education that equips the individual citizen with the knowledge and skills needed for the performance of productive task. It is a type of education that helps the society to meet up with their developmental needs. Functional citizenship education prepares the individual to face his social goals, economic realities and future life challenges positively. Good cited in Kayode and Adagba (2014) views functional citizenship education as education for which there is an expected application, which thus implies that the individual has immediate meaning, transferable into action of his learning activities. Abdu (2005) perceives functional education as the wholesome training of an individual that makes him/her useful to the community and the nation as a whole. It is the education in which the ability to perform productive tasks is more stressed than the education that aims at producing ideological conformity. In fact, functional education is a useful weapon for addressing the challenges of democracy, insecurity and national unity. This is because it is practical oriented, stimulates and empowers an individual with saleable skills and values to positively solve immediate problems for individual and the society at large. Live as ordered and disciplined life; understand his interest and vocation; and have the zeal to succeed amidst all odds. Thus, functional citizenship education has the ability of enhancing all manners of developmental strides like improved infrastructure, stable electricity, good roads, standard healthcare facilities, steady water supply, integrated rural development, poverty reduction, improvement in people's standard of living, reduction in different types of security challenges being experienced in the country, increased economic growth (most especially in agricultural production). Positive attitude to work and self- reliance, political stability and patriotism.

Democracy

Democracy is a political system that is widely practiced and cherished by so many nations and societies around the world of which Nigeria is part. Democracy is



defined as a system of government whereby power is exercised as a mandate which is sourced through election, due process of law and the constitution. Scott and Marshal (2005) perceived democracy as the rule of citizens. According to them democratic system was framed to allow all citizens to have a voice in decisions that would affect all. Similarly, democracy can be viewed as a system of government in which people of a country can vote to elect their representatives and it is something that can be firmly achieved where there is a good government. Furthermore, Nwabuzo cited in Christ, Amujiri and Ndibe (2015) viewed democracy to be a political system in which the qualified people in the society actively take part not only in determining the type of people that govern them, but also participate in shaping the policy drive of the government.

More importantly, true democracy means more than a constitution, elections and the rule of law. It is also about widespread acceptance of a social pact that entails responsible actions, good citizenship and a belief that no one is above the law of the land.

In addition, democracy signifies empathy and respect for others as well as a deep rooted belief that individual cooperation and willingness to consider issues from the perspective of others, rather than one's own democratic conviction. Democracy therefore, is the system of government that is derived from public opinions and is accountable to it. In ideal situation where democratic tenets are upheld the citizens stands to enjoy a lot of dividends such as the rights and access to sound and functional education, quality health care delivery, freedom of movement, expression, fair hearing, religion, association, availability of food that can put the challenges of hunger and starvation to flee, quality and conducive shelter, adequate social security and other benefits which can impact lives of the citizens positively. However, democracy in Nigeria is plagued with many problems such as, electoral fraud, corruption, electoral violence, abuse of freedom, institutionalization of poverty, slow decision making, bad politicians, poor representation, economic mismanagement, poor leadership and ethnic/sectional politics and so on. Some of these challenges mentioned here will still be discussed subsequently.

National Unity

Unity means oneness, cohesion, trust, mutual understanding. Unity is a process of forming a strong national identity among diverse groups of people in the society that have differences in beliefs, culture, customs, politics, social, economic, functions and location into a political entity free from tribal sentiment and religious intolerance. National unity is a way or process of uniting various groups that have different social and cultural backgrounds into physical entity (Olubadewo, 2014). Similarly, Ojo cited in Onifade and Imhonapi (2013) perceives national unity as the process of unifying a society which tends to make it harmonious, based upon order and its members regard it as equitable and harmonious. In addition, Morrison in



Onifade and Imhonapi (2013) sees national unity as a process by which members of a social system become less consequential in affecting behavior. In this process member of the social system develop a growing sequence of contact, cooperation, agreement and community. In fact, the terms used for national unity have included national cohesion, national integration, nation building and social solidarity. According to Eme Uche cited in Eme Uche and Chigozie (2020) national unity foster's a feeling of common purpose that bind people of different cultures, colours and ethnic nationalities together. Chang, Azizan and Amran (2013) describe it as the process of bringing people of various races with different culture under one form of national identity. From the above definitions, it can be detected that national unity is possible when ethnic groups within a political setting maintain unity by coming together to reach consensus, social structures and function in society which bring about social order.

Agents or Agencies that promotes Functional Citizenship Education

Functional and well-designed citizenship education can serve as an effective tool for equipping and enhancing citizens' participation in the democratic process and the development of their country. To effectively address the numerous challenges facing Nigeria, the following agents play a crucial role:

1. **Educational Institutions:** Schools and educational institutions have a vital role in imparting citizenship education to students. By integrating citizenship education into the curriculum and providing quality teaching, educational institutions can equip students with the necessary knowledge, skills, and values to become active and responsible citizens.
2. **Government:** The government plays a significant role in promoting and implementing citizenship education policies and programs. It should prioritize the inclusion of citizenship education in the national educational system, provide adequate resources and support for teacher training, and ensure that citizenship education is effectively delivered to all citizens (Odigie Edozor, 2013).
3. **Civil Society Organizations:** Non-governmental organizations and civil society groups play a crucial role in promoting citizenship education through awareness campaigns, advocacy, and community engagement. They can organize workshops, seminars, and public forums to raise awareness and foster active citizenship among individuals and communities.
4. **Media:** The media, including print, broadcast, and online platforms, have the power to shape public opinion and influence citizens' understanding of citizenship and democracy. Responsible media outlets can contribute to citizenship education by providing accurate and balanced information, promoting civic dialogue, and highlighting the importance of active citizenship. (Ranti, O.I. 2012)



5. Families and Communities: The family unit and local communities play a vital role in instilling values, ethics, and a sense of civic responsibility in individuals from an early age.

By fostering a culture of active citizenship, families and communities can contribute to the development of responsible and engaged citizens. (Okoli, A.C. 2015)

It is important to note that the concerted efforts of these agents that functional citizenship education can be effectively implemented, leading to increased citizens' participation in the democratic process and the overall development of Nigeria.

Impediments to Democracy and National Unity in Nigeria

Through the course of time, a number of issues and difficulties have interfered with or threatened Nigeria's efforts to achieve democracy and national unity. The majority of Nigerians continue to live in a state of fear, insecurity, poverty, frustration, hunger, unemployment, illiteracy, rising internal displacement cases, and deteriorating infrastructure, despite some efforts having been made in various sectors at various times. The following list highlights a few of these obstacles:

1. *Poor Leadership*: Through the course of time, a number of issues and difficulties have interfered with or threatened Nigeria's efforts to achieve democracy and national unity. The majority of Nigerians continue to live in a state of fear, insecurity, poverty, frustration, hunger, unemployment, illiteracy, rising internal displacement cases, and degrading facilities, despite certain attempts having been made in various sectors at various times. The following list highlights a few of these obstacles:

According to Aja (2006:1), leadership entails the ability to "inspire, motivate, and coordinate a people or constituency against the odds in the methods of realizing a vision without losing passion, coherence, or stability. The majority of Nigerian leaders (across the board) have occasionally abused their positions and let self-interest get the better of them at the expense of the country's interest, in spite of the false campaign promises made by Nigerian politicians and their commitments to respect the sanctity of the constitution. Political leadership continues to emerge based on racial, religious, and political attitudes. The qualities of a good leader-integrity, honesty, fairness, transparency, competence, and sacrifice-have all but been abandoned in Nigeria.

2. *Corruption*: It has been determined that corruption is the single most harmful monster preventing Nigeria's progress and development in all areas. According to Ifamose (2007), corruption is the outward display of anti-social activity by a person or group of people wherein unfair advantage is



obtained as a result. The act typically violates the society's established moral standards in that it limits the state's ability to properly and fairly care for the people's material and spiritual wellbeing. Similar to Lawal (2012) and Ukachukwu (2015), these authors listed several different types of fraudulent activity as well as sabotage, illegal payments, money laundering, trafficking in illegal drugs, falsification of records and documents, false declarations, tax evasion, forgery, deception, aiding and abetting criminal activity, and other forms of corruption in Nigeria.

3. *Terrorism*: The words "terrorism" and "terror" are both derived from the Latin verb "terrere," which means "to frighten," according to Alao and Atere (2012:3). Terrorism is defined as acts that target citizens, facilities, or systems that they depend on in order to cause harm to certain people in order to instill terror in others. A Moslem fundamentalist group called Boko Haram, led by Yusuf Mohammed, first appeared in Maiduguri, Borno State, in 2009. The group had increased terrorist activities in Nigeria, targeting churches, mosques, schools, government offices, security facilities such as military and police barracks among others. The activities of this sects in and around the country slows down or hinders the continued existence of democratic governance and a threat to national unity

4. *Decayed Infrastructure, Slow Pace of Industrialization and Over Reliant on Oil*: Sustained democratic governance and National unity is hardly possible with a failing technological and economic foundation. Nigeria's industrial sector has nearly crumbled over the years as a result of bad leadership, an unfavorable business climate, and a power or energy problem. Just like other developing countries around the world whose economy are heavily dependent on a single source of income, the fate of Nigeria over the years has been gloomy. As a result, the government has fallen short in its obligations to provide some basic services and pay government employees' salaries on time.

Functional Citizenship Education, Democracy and National Unity: The Meeting Point

Functional citizenship education plays a crucial role in fostering democracy and national unity. It aims to create awareness among citizens about their responsibilities towards the government and emphasizes the reciprocal nature of rights and duties. Good citizenship entails fulfilling certain duties that contribute to the advancement of democracy and national unity. These duties include:

1. Abiding by the constitution and respecting its ideals and institutions.
2. Showing respect for national symbols such as the flag, anthem, and pledge.
3. Respecting legitimate authorities and following their directives.
4. Protecting the country's image and reputation.



5. Participating in the electoral process.
6. Engaging in national service as required.
7. Respecting the dignity and rights of fellow citizens.
8. Living in harmony and promoting a spirit of brotherhood.
9. Making beneficial and constructive contributions to the development and well-being of the community.
10. Enhancing the Preservation of law and order.
11. Honest Asset Declaration and prompt tax payment (Chapter 11, Section 24, Amended Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999:35)

It is important to note that when all the points mentioned above is fully inculcated and internalized in the citizens, the results will be evidently seen to be positively related to the production of qualitative manpower, acceleration of economic growth, production of political elites, equalize income distribution, forge national unity and integration and enhance cultural and social advancement. In every nation, it is the citizens that is educated, thus after their education, they will in turn be equipped with the needed knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary to function and engage positively in activities that will promote economic, social, and political development of the country. In this way, functional citizenship education has a multiplier effects as it takes care of the present and ensures that the future is not left out, raises the standard of living and serves as unified factor of citizens of different socio-economic, cultural, political and religion background.

In addition, functional citizenship educations, according to develops the individual's intelligence as well as makes him/her acquire an holistic development-socially, culturally, morally, economically, politically and technologically suitable to perform various duties that are expected to uplift and support the development of the individual, his immediate community and the nation at large. It equips the recipients with original practical skills and knowledge to harness their potentials; provides opportunities for individuals to develop their talents to the fullest without hindrance or barriers. Furthermore, provision of functional citizenship education helps inculcate the right type of values and attitudes in the recipients, which will expectedly, strengthen and promotes democratic ideals and the rule of law. A stable and vibrant democracy free from all forms of corruption is a requirement for rapid national development and at the same time promotes peaceful coexistence (Olapade, Bola & Aderibigbe 2002). More importantly, functional citizenship education provides the best school-based teaching and learning program that lead students to acquire skills, values, beliefs, knowledge and attitudes that supports democracy in various ways. For example, it aids the development of critical thinking skills in all areas of the curriculum so that students can analyze and evaluate ideas and situations from a variety of perspectives in order to come to a well-reasoned and



substantive position. It also gives school-based experiences with voting, holding elective office and advocating positions. In fact a crucial reason why since independence, Nigeria had not been able to develop a viable popular and genuinely democratic polity is that most of the politicians lacks the needed commitment to democracy, they have never experienced democracy, neither do they know its philosophy nor its history. Therefore, functional citizenship education is one of the most potent means of preparing students for true democracy. In other words, citizenship education should be taught through schooling; which is an agent of education. The school should help young people to understand democracy and its values fully (Olapade, Bola & Aderibigbe 2002)

Conclusion

Democracy and National Unity in Nigeria is very much linked to effective citizenship education. The content of citizenship education will awaken the consciousness of the Nigerian citizens to their rights and duties. Therefore, as a condition to improve the country's democratic practice and national unity, a functional citizenship education becomes non- negotiable.

Suggestion

Citizenship education plays a vital role in instilling the necessary values, dispositions, and perspective in individuals for the promotion of democracy and national unity. Education serves as a tool for informing, transforming, and equipping citizens with the skills and knowledge needed to contribute meaningfully to society. The active involvement of citizens in governance greatly contributes to the sustainability of democracy and enhances political participation, ensuring that the benefits of democracy are enjoyed by the majority of citizens.

Despite efforts by the Nigerian government since independence to address these issues, the country still faces numerous challenges that hinder the achievement of sustained democracy and national unity. To overcome these challenges, it is suggested that a collective effort be made to strengthen the instruction of civics or citizenship education at all educational levels in Nigeria. This includes integrating citizenship education into the curriculum and ensuring its effective delivery.

Additionally, there is a need to reinvigorate the National Orientation Agency's (NOA) activities to increase its presence and impact, especially at the local level. The NOA can play a crucial role in raising awareness, promoting civic engagement, and fostering a sense of national identity and unity among citizens.

It is crucial that all stakeholders, including the government, educational institutions, civil society organizations, media, families, and communities, work together to reinforce citizenship education and its importance in shaping responsible and active citizens. By doing so, Nigeria can overcome its challenges and move towards a stronger democracy and greater national unity.



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