

CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION: A POTENT INSTRUMENT FOR NIGERIA NATIONAL UNITY AND STABILITY

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Abstract

Citizenship education refers to training of individuals concerning themselves and the state by imparting social values, ethics, norms and spirit of patriotism in order to emancipate them and transform them into responsible citizens who are poised to contribute maximally for overall development of self and society. Through citizenship education, individuals acquire knowledge on how to become good citizens. Good citizens are responsible, rational and detribalized citizens who are cultured and have impeccable qualities of patriotism, nationalism and total allegiance to the state. A good citizen is an honest and upright person who shuns all forms of selfishness, corruption, egocentrism, parochialism and ethnicity, and at the same time upholds national ethics, values and attitudes with a burning desire to render selfless service. This paper provides various definitions of citizenship education as proffered by different scholars and x-rays the meaning and aims of citizenship education in Nigeria. Then, it delved into the consequences of failed citizenship education which include but not limited to precipitation of corrupt, irresponsible and non-responsive style of leadership among the leaders and production of equally corrupt and disgruntled followers with some feeling of neglect and marginalization. Such citizens pursue self and sectional interests and agenda including economic sabotage, which create an atmosphere of conflict, disunity and instability. The paper therefore recommends that for continued existence of the country, peace, unity and stability, effective citizenship education should be entrenched in the curricula for students at all levels of education. Only politicians who profess good citizenship should be allowed to occupy elective positions at all times.

Keywords: Ethics, discrimination, citizenship education, patriotism, nationalism, national unity, national stability, cultural diversity, marginalization, corruption, cultural values

Introduction

Nigeria is a country blessed with abundant human and material resources. It is a plural state with diverse ethnic nationalities and cultural identities. She has a rich cultural heritage which if well harnessed can contribute significantly to economic growth and development. Also, the mineral resources the country is blessed with if well harnessed will provide development and comfortable enjoyment of life for the citizens. However, despite the abundant human and material resources the country is endowed with, she still grapples with myriad of challenges which stunt economic, scientific, social and technological growth of the country. For instance, Nigeria has acquired international notoriety in criminal activities such as drug addiction and trafficking, baby factory and child trafficking, adulteration of goods, armed robbery, political and examination malpractices, kidnapping, killing including extrajudicial, cultism, treasury looting, cybercrime, bribery and corruption, diversion of public funds, embezzlement, lawlessness, poor leadership quality, etc. (Ndukwe, 2013). Furthermore, arson, violence, vandalism, social unrest and religious intolerance have persisted. In recent time, insecurity and calls for decentralization or possible breakup have emerged in Nigerian political space.

Nigeria could have fared better if political leaders have done better by maintaining equity, justice and fairness in every facet of the society. Leaders who are transparent, dedicated, honest, detribalized and patriotic can make the needed difference. They can harness the abundant human and material resources for economic betterment of the citizens of the country. As of today, Nigerian political leaders can be best described as epitomes of corruption, tribalism, nepotism, favouritism, parochialism and marginalization as they place selfish interests above collective interests thereby jeopardizing national development, unity and stability in the process (Chikwe, 2020). Apparently, they are not interested in upholding or maintaining the national ethics which include discipline, integrity, dignity of labour, social justice, tolerance, self-reliance and patriotism (Adeniran & Onifade, 2013). They are lacking in nationalistic ideals which makes one wonders if they have ever acquired citizenship education. In this 21st century, and with the unfortunate inter-ethnic and religious crises that have become a common occurrence in Nigeria, it becomes imperative to introduce citizenship education as it relates to national consciousness, unity and stability.

Citizenship education was defined by Iyamu (2017) as a conscious effort to inculcate in youths a set of values and attitude contingent on the need and problems of the society. Yusuf (2015) defined it as a system for the acquisition and internalization of values, sentiment and norms of the society in which people live and actually get involved to ensure that the common good of the citizens is catered for including resisting antisocial and unguided youthful exuberances. To Osakwe (2013), citizenship education conveys to the learners, the body of knowledge, set of values, attitude and behavioural orientations that are considered vital and necessary for the sustenance and survival of the society and maintenance of law, order, peace and the wellbeing of the people. Citizenship education refers to training of individuals concerning themselves and the state, and it does not only socialize them, but emancipates and transforms them for functional roles in a dynamic society (Duverger, 2012). It is the training of the youths to become clear-thinking and enlightened citizens who participate in decision-making concerning the society (Hokabyan, 2016). Citizenship education helps us to maintain our cultural values which are those worthwhile and acceptable aspects of non-material culture of the people which helps in molding the character of the people. Citizenship education helps us to maintain our cultural values which are also ethics and attitudes that a particular society cherishes or abhors for the peaceful co-existence of members of the society which brings about the development of such society (Onifade & Imhonopi, 2013; Nwuzor, 2012).

Aims of citizenship education

Through citizenship education, people are made aware of ethics, extant laws, their duties/obligations, privileges, fundamental human rights and citizens' rights recognized by the national constitution. Through citizenship education, people are trained in tolerance, liberty, patriotism, dignity and solidarity, and are made aware of equality of the people before the law. Citizenship education is capable of helping Nigerians to become good citizens. A good citizen is the one who possesses certain desirable attributes including looking at things with a democratic slant; believing in decency and fair play, forbearance and acquisition of the customs, tradition and nationalistic ideals of his country. Citizenship education produces responsible citizens who are positive change agents that have zero tolerance for social, economic and environmental injustice (Ojo, 2015; Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2011). It also produces people who are equipped with knowledge and understanding, people who have respect for justice, democracy, and rule of law, people who are skilled in openness, tolerance, courage to defend a good point of view and willingness to listen to others, work with and stand up for others. It helps in character-building, development of skills, initiative and spirit of teamwork among the people for the optimum contribution to personal and societal development. Citizenship education is useful for eliminating myopic viewpoints and racism exhibited by children/youths nurtured in environments ignorant of cultures other than their own or dominant cultures of the society they find themselves. Through the knowledge of these other cultures and the very existence of multicultural life in the society which are in the purview/domain of citizenship education, people are fortified against despising others based on their cultures.

Citizenship education helps to equip young people to deal decisively with situations of conflict and controversy knowledgeably and tolerantly. It enables them to understand the consequences of their actions and those of other people around them. The organization of instruction, programmes, sensitization and training for young people, as in citizenship education inculcates in them desirable habits, values, behavioural patterns, spirit of nationalism and patriotism and instills changes in them toward positive contribution to the society. Producing patriotic, emotionally stable, unbiased, selfless, nationalistic, detribalized, clear thinking and responsible citizens is among the ultimate aims of citizenship education. Making people become patriotic, socially responsible and good citizens by understanding the social milieu (Azide, 2017) and socializing youths against juvenile delinquency, disrespect for

elders/constituted authorities and other fraudulent practices which often metamorphose into criminal activities are also among the aims of citizenship education. For Yusuf (2015), the aim of the citizenship classes is to develop young people into responsible citizens who understand their rights and responsibilities and can play an active part in development of the society. Omare (2014) is of the view that citizenship education trains the mind of people in the direction of what is required for a stable and enduring democracy. Citizenship education in our school system will inculcate national moral values and develop truly patriotic citizens whose consciousness transcends ethnic boundaries and as a consequence produce educated citizens who know their rights, duties and obligations to the country. It helps to broaden the horizon of the learner and make him to operate beyond parochial levels of ethnicity and religion (Onyeoziri, 2012).

In Nigeria, social studies subject particularly citizenship education is a concept geared towards healing the wounds of the civil war, ethnocentricity, social and political problems, and to promote cultural and national integration, co-operation, good citizenship, etc. Citizenship education which trains citizens to be aware of the human and political issues at stake in their society or nation requires from each citizen ethical and moral qualities. All forms of citizenship education aim at shaping respect for others by fostering a spirit of tolerance and peace. Citizenship education enables members of a society to acquire full knowledge not only of the state, but also of their duties and obligations to the state, their rights and expectations from the state, the necessity of total conformity with accepted ways and standards of life of the people, the need for full compliance with rules and regulations and total allegiance to the state. Effective citizenship education should be able to inculcate a feeling of belonging and of involvement among the various people of the country to such an extent that national loyalty must override or supersede sectional loyalty. Citizenship education develops in individuals, skills, attitudes and values that will enable them to show concern for the wellbeing and dignity of others, respecting the worth of others and approaching civil decisions in rational manner (Edosa, 2010). It reshapes value system and orientation, and enables learners to think beyond their individual and ethnic interests, thereby making them to tolerate and respect the views of others.

Consequences of failed citizenship education

Consequences of failed citizenship education can be grievous as corruption, chaos and stunted development may be the order of the day. Selfishness and greed on the part of the leaders which is against the tenets of citizenship education is the bane of national integration (Suberu, 2010). Government sponsored discrimination is a clear statement against national unity even as it represents an official case of government approved human rights abuse (Onwudiwe, 2010). There are numerous ugly consequences of absence of or unheeded citizenship education among which are narcissism, parochialism, marginalization, agitation, conflicts, militancy, calls for resource control, lopsidedness in provision of amenities, appointment or recruitment. Calls for secession or restructuring, national conference and rotational leadership are offshoots of failed national integration arising from poor citizenship education, absence of citizenship education, ineffective or unheeded citizenship education. Furthermore, rather than experiencing diminishing influence of tribalism and ethnicity in Nigeria political space in the face of an emergent, virile and modern nations, integration failure brought about by failed citizenship education in Nigeria has resulted in increasing tribalism and ethnicity which has become a potent source of friction and instability (Edosa, 2014).

Olufemi (2005) noted that while the geo-political divide and mutual suspicion between the north and south have been resilient factors in Nigeria's political life, at no other time had the structural contradictions in the polity degenerated into multiple fratricidal and seemingly irreconcilable conflicts than in the period of the fourth republic since 1999 till date. The depth and dimension of this development are reflected in the rise and popularity of ethnic movements such as Odua People's Congress (OPC), Arewa People's Congress (APC), Egbesu Boys, Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Ijaw Youths Congress, Bakassi Boys, and recently Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) all of whom are canvassing for competing ethnic interests. In other words, the failure of citizenship education and by extension national integration has given rise to calls or agitation for true federalism, sovereign national conference, rotational presidency/leadership, strict enforcement of federal policy or federal character and possible breakup of the country into component regions. Regional security outfits have emerged which have become an indictment to the failure of the national security outfits occasioned by failed citizenship education and national integration. Notable among these regional security outfits are Eastern Security Network (ESN) by Indigenous People of Biafra and Ebubeagu (South-East), Omotekun security outfit of the South-West, Ospac security outfit of the South-South. The emergence of these security outfits is an indication of disenchantment about the nation fulfilling its statutory obligations to the citizens.

Citizenship education for national unity and stability

According to Ifidon (2016) Nigerians have duties and obligations to

- i. abide by the constitution, respect national values, ethics and ideals
- ii. help to enhance the power, prestige and good name of Nigeria, defend Nigeria and render such national service as may be required.
- iii. respect the dignity of other citizens, their rights and legitimate interests and live in unity, peace and harmony, and in the spirit of common brotherhood.
- iv. make positive contribution to the advancement, progress and wellbeing of the communities where they reside.

However, most Nigerians who have not imbibed the tenets of citizenship education apparently lack a sense of patriotism and national consciousness. This is because for many years now, the politicians across board who also have not imbibed the tenets of citizenship education run non-responsive and non-inclusive governments. This explains the reason why most Nigerians have lost faith in the leadership to cater for their needs. They have also lost confidence in one Nigeria and they devote incalculable efforts in sectional, ethnic and religious interests. There are indications that Nigerian nation is experiencing disunity and instability in recent times occasioned by poor leadership quality of those in government who apparently lack qualities of good citizens. There is no gainsaying that in Nigeria at this moment, ethnic affiliation is stronger than patriotism and nationalism. Hence, little or no attention is paid to national interests making the country volatile, unstable and disunited.

The unity and stability of the country lies in the palms of those saddled with the responsibility of administering the country. Policies and programmes favouring some sections of the country with the neglect of others can only result to dissatisfaction and facilitate agitation and calls for separation. Furthermore, when the government allows most of its lofty programmes and policies to crumble at implementation stage because those saddled with the responsibility of leadership fail to imbibe good qualities of virtuous citizenship due to failure of citizenship education, the consequences could be dire. Edinyang and Ubi (2013) are of the view that a complete failure of citizenship education in Nigeria can result if citizenship education fails to produce a sizeable percentage of honest, dedicated, law-abiding and hardworking Nigerians. It is common these days for people in one region to give ultimatum that people who hail from other regions should return to their regions of origin. Kidnappers even segregate commuting passengers who are their victims based on their tribes and religion and take those from hated tribes and religion into the forest where they are kept and maltreated until adequate ransom is paid.

There are instances where people of one tribe invade communities of people from other tribes and kill as many as possible, and at the same time leave arson and destruction of property on their trails. In some communities, people find it difficult to go to farm or embark on some economic activities because of fear of the activities of herdsmen. The rising land dispute and attendant communal clashes is a serious source of concern to well-meaning Nigerians. The activities of the Boko Haram sect and bandits in the North leave much to be desired. They have succeeded in creating the atmosphere of insecurity and terrorism. They indulge in massive and senseless killing, arson and abduction of people.

It is an open secret that bunkering (which is drilling of holes on crude-carrying pipes and diverting crude oil to containers which is locally refined for economic gains) is going on unabated in the regions producing crude oil especially in the southern region. Based on many years of neglect and abandonment, people have lost faith in authorities and no longer wait for them to harness the oil resources and bring dividends of democracy and development to them. The people now take their destiny in their own hands by ensuring that they use the resources they have at their backyards to take care of themselves.

In different regions, the story is the same, the army, police and other law enforcement agents are targets of the unknown gun men. Many security agents have lost their lives in recent times to the activities of unknown gun men. Though the activities of unknown gun men are more pronounced in the South-East, other regions also have their fair share of their criminality.

Corruption, impunity and massive looting of the national treasury is still going on unabated in the country (Kaigama, 2021). There are shoddy practices in all aspects of our national lives. The leaders divert or embezzle funds meant for development of the country thereby creating infrastructural decay and deficit. Members of

Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) have their hands full trying to prevent or contain corrupt practices in the country. These negative experiences and turbulence the country is passing through are indications that the country is disunited and unstable. The overwhelming anarchy and lawlessness in the country may be responsible for calls for separation, resource control and rotational presidency. Until the leaders and those in positions of trust in Nigeria begin to imbibe the quality of good citizenship and leadership, and administer the country with world best practices as advocated in citizenship education; until there is emergence of dedicated, selfless, detribalized, altruistic leaders who have political will to shun corruption, greed, tribalism and nepotism in the appointment of people into positions of trust and sitting of projects or social amenities, the led may also not imbibe the quality of good citizenship and signs of dissatisfaction in the administration of affairs of the nation, lawlessness, agitation and calls for separation may heighten which may culminate in civil strife and possible disintegration of the country.

Conclusion

The corruption free, humane, moral, peaceful, united and integrated society which Nigeria is craving for cannot be achieved without a sound foundation as well as instruction in social studies in general and citizenship education in particular. Effective citizenship education transforms the citizens to live legally in the society and contribute meaningfully to its progress. It trains out leaders who are found worthy in learning and character to occupy sensitive political positions. Until citizenship education begins to train out conscientious and detribalized individuals who are honest, responsible, accountable and morally upright, individuals who can shun all forms of vices, corruption and fraudulent practices, individuals who can shun selfishness and avarice, individuals who can also shun all forms of favouritism, nepotism, parochialism, lopsidedness in appointment of people into positions and siting of projects, and individuals who can uphold the rules of law, citizenship education in Nigeria can be best described as academic exercise. In the face of ineffective citizenship education, the country could slide deeper into lawlessness, corruption, disenchantment, agitation, underdevelopment, conflict and possible breakup.

Recommendation

For national unity and stability and to save the country from total disintegration, fervent and aggressive citizenship education should be embarked upon in the country. The citizenship education should emphasize patriotism, nationalistic ideals, rule of law, altruism, human rights protection, selflessness, detribalization, love for humanity (philanthropism), perfection, etc. The citizenship education should be included in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions' curricular as a compulsory subject or course of study. Students who fail it should not be promoted. Schools of citizenship education should be established in each state. A politician wishing to vie for any elective position should take a course in citizenship education first and if passed should be certified as a patriot. For a politician to conclude his electioneering campaign, he should be subjected to a debate with other contestants. Most questions that should be asked during the debate must be drawn from citizenship education. Those who perform poorly in the debate should be disqualified. In this way, leaders should be grounded in citizenship and leadership matters and will be conversant with what it takes to become a good citizen and a good leader. Occupying positions of trust should no longer be for all comers. Only those who have demonstrated qualities of good citizens should be entrusted with important leadership positions. Only those who have loyalty to the nation-state, and regard people irrespective of their regions, religions or states of origin as one and work for overall good, peace and harmony of the nation should serve as leaders. This will certainly promote unity and stability in the country as no one should be discriminated against based on region, religion, sex, tribe or ethnicity any more. In this way, attempts should not be made to develop or favour one part of the country at the expense of others. Furthermore, no individual should 'corner' the common wealth of the people for himself. It is when this is done that appointments, amenities and resources will be evenly and equitable distributed, and the resources of the people will be used for the good of the people and overall development of the country. Then people will have reason to be happy with themselves and the country and will be sufficiently patriotic to be associated with the country. In this way, the cry of neglect and marginalization will be reduced to the barest minimum and the country will remain one indivisible, virile, united and stable nation where majority of the people will be happy and ready to identify with and defend the country.

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