

Education and Democratic Process

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Abstract: Education is seen as an agent of democracy. Any nation aiming at socio-political development needs a sound and functional education. Pure and genuine democratic process cannot be realized without a sound education that develops critical and analytical thinking. It is an undoubted fact that democracy is the best system of government in the world over. But unfortunately, Nigeria practice democracy in a questionable manner. There is no way one can divorce education from democracy, the two are highly inseparable, they are interrelated and interconnected. It is therefore, the purpose of this study to examine not only the integrative and reproductive function of education and also which is the crux of the matter, the transformative function in the context of the nation socio-political equation. The ultimate aim is to suggest how education could be used for translating the national political theory into an actuality. Although, at a certain level of analysis education might be regarded as an end in itself in the context of the national political equation it is a means to an end. This study is going to discuss democracy in operation, Education and individual in the society, Education as agent of democracy and the juxtaposition of the two concepts.

Key words: Democracy, education, individual, society, national political theory, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

African leaders during and post colonial periods tended to think of development in terms of the visible aspect of modernization that are related to large buildings and complex machines to the relative neglect of the more intellectual foundation of modernity. They failed to appreciate that education ought to lead to the cultivation of a complete and total development. To realize this development depends on the forms of government in place. The only universally accepted system of government is undoubtedly the Democratic system. Therefore to embark on a serious and sincere Democratic system, versatile and scientific systems of thinking are needed. This is necessary because the analytic study of grassroots problems should not be slaughtered at the altar of institutionalism. The colonialists especially British under their colonial rule ignorantly brought together many nations and made them a nation like what happened in Nigeria and other African countries. This was a calculated mistake. They never attempted to investigate the respective, theses and antitheses of that exercise before it was done. It was absolutely done for selfish reasons. Thus, the unholy marriage of incompatibilities called amalgamation that became preponderant during colonial era brought a defective democrat process. The incursion of democratic ideology during the period and the stupid and foolish acceptance of it without consideration for the culture and diversities still make the body politics to be

sick. Therefore to cure this sickness, sound education becomes imperative. Though democracy as we shall soon see stands highest in the hierarchy of societies, yet it is neither fixed nor static, it is even in a state of change even being reformed and reconstructed. One may then be tempted to ask the question whether democracy can operate outside the society. Dewey (1916) was of the opinion that the word society must be in terms of the society one has in mind, whether the collectivist, the class-dominated, the tradition-bound or custom ridden society but the highest in the hierarchy and the standard is the democratic society, which as Dewey (1916) claims, is more than a form of government but is rather primarily a way of life a mode of associated living and of conjoint communicated experience.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Going by its etymological meaning democracy could be broken into two identified meanings Demos which means people and Kratos meaning to rule or power or dominion. In the early stages of Greek political ethos, Stanley (1967) asserts that the morality of the time gave the ordinary people or poor people the chance to rule to govern even the rich people. This was the fruit of the ideal of democracy. During the Ancient period, Greek city-states developed the democratic system of government when the middle class economists of the time did over-ride the Aristocrats of the noble class taking

over power. This rehearsed the traditional system of governance which favoured only the privileged class and put in place democracy. At this time everything was put on simple voting. And those empowered to vote had freedom of choice. Thus, both expressions and the custodians of these expressions were noted. But this does not mean that the ideal of democracy was all embracing. That means, it still excluded some persons and group of persons in both classes of gender. For instance as claimed by Frankle (1972) slaves were not considered as human beings as the seventh century B.C Greek mentality suggested. This made them not to be eligible to vote. Women were relegated to the background and as such they were deemed not worthy to vote for they took no part in public affairs and had no political rights. This disclaims for women affected many cultures and nations especially in modern times. But the United state of America was one of the great countries that revisited this and restored the women's dignity of human person. Onuigbo (2001) asserted that during the 10th amendment of the constitution on voting based on gender in the United States of America, women were accorded the right to vote in the year 1920. So it is reasonable for someone to say that problem exist also in democracy ever since the inception of this political ideology. Although, opinions may be diversified as regards the definition of democracy, there are some universal agreements as to what democracy ought to be. Abraham Lincoln, for instance declared that democracy is the government of the people by the people and for the people internationally, people have favour for this definition as ideal. And this is in direct opposition to such regimes for whom might is right, such as totalitarianism, feudalisms dictatorship, militarism, authoritarianism, imperialism, capitalism and the like that subordinate all authorities to themselves.

Democracy as its history suggests arose from protest against despolitic feudal, imperial, totalitarian and the like governments. By so doing it claims to be a government that has the issue of freedom and responsibility in its manifesto. The respect for person, the dignity of the human person and non-marginalized operative government should reign in a democratic set-up. In all, the right to vote and be voted for should be of primary importance as this should not be a private reserve of a corrupt oriented privileged few (as is the case in Nigeria since independence to the present day). This would go a long way to letting lose the shades and barriers of class, race and nepotic rationalization. If this were done, Dewey (1916) believes men, women and young people would discover their potentials and perceive the full impute of their activity and contribution to human race.

The phenomenon of the oppressed has very close links with the coming of democracy to Nigeria. Even

thought it has failed, a number of times yet people in Nigeria insist on a Euro-American kind of democracy. The truism of this statement is the fact that many African nations including Nigeria still send their legislators to either Europe or American for refresher course in Democratic process. Oblivious of the historical truth that Africa has had an organized system of government before the European came. There is a kind of oppressive politics practiced by the so-called westerners on the Africans and the Nigerians in particular. This has been in existence since the slave trade era through the colonial times to the post-colonial period. And this kind of politics is designed for their own benefits. It catches up with a study of the encountered (enslaved, colonized), goes through the nature of his psyche and operates with an analysed result to the profit of the European.

But one should not allow the intimidation of the west especially through their diplomatic tantrums and their new economic language of globalization to influence the own brand of democracy. We may not be tempted to say no to the politics of voting and the good economic-political totbits offered by the modern brand of democracy for these remind us of the pranks played by the British in 1914 as they did the amalgamation exercise of fusing two big nations into a yet bigger and complicated nation just for their own benefits and self interest as pushed by their egocentrism.

Democracy itself is a good thing. It is a worthwhile political imperative, especially where it is contextualised. If we want a democracy that would suit Nigeria then we should study those potential theses that could make up some political conjectures. We should match these theses with an analysis of some anti theses of discord that could distract the body politics, when this is done we should conclude with an emergent synthesis which should practically reconcile the two conflicting theses. By this, we mean that we should be able to identify the problems properly before we go on with a kind of democracy that goes on rocking the boat of Nigeria progressive categories.

Education as agent of democracy: Education and democracy look like Siamese Twins, they look inseparable when it comes to their functionality in any society. Education to some people is a process by which individual develops physically, mentally, socially and spiritually so that he becomes a well-rounded healthy, responsible, happy and intelligent citizen in a democratic society. The aim of education is to produce an educated man. By this, an educated man is somebody who enjoys what he does somebody who faces his problems and solve them and does not turn away from them, somebody

who understands other peoples problems somebody who does the right thing at the right time and in the right place. Somebody who knows his rights and stands up to them, somebody who is a lover of democracy and defend his fundamental human rights with all sense of rationality.

Equally important is the fact that education as polymorphous as it is has a set of values possessed by an educated person and lacked by an uneducated person. These values which necessarily begin with literacy must include knowledge of the type which comes through that literacy and intellectual development which follows such experience. This is in line with O' Common (1959) assertion that the educational system of any society is more or less elaborate social mechanism designed to bring about in persons submitted to it certain skills and attitudes that are judged to be useful and desirable in the society. Desirability in this sense connoted the understanding of the democratic values in democracy, which include freedom of association, freedom of expression, freedom of religion and so on. In actual fact any definition at all, given to education are implicitly or explicitly harp on the centrality of the acquisition of knowledge skills and attitudes considered useful and desirable in a particular society. It is a fact that the acquisition of knowledge, skill and attitudes is mediated through the mind. This is to say that the essence of education consists not necessarily only but above all in the acquisition of a trained mind that understands the values and operations of democracy in an acclaimed democratic society like Nigeria.

Education and individual in the society: The individual in the society according to Dewey (1916) is an intellectual entity. It could be seen like that rather than being seeing as a social economic or even political individual. Thus the intellectual freedom of the individual deserves special attention and recognition to enhance political freedom and liberation. In actual fact, individualism connotes having one's own purpose and problem and doing one's own thinking, displaying originality in action and variation in points of view. The individual is free in so far as he is efficient in action capable of carrying out his plans in the absence of cramping and thwarting obstacles, capable of changing his course of actions, capable of experiencing novelties and with power of desire and choice, which is an essential element of freedom. The pill of realizing all this is scientific knowledge through education. Education gives freedom. Regarding freedom Dewey (1916) declared, the important thing to bear in mind is that it designates a mental attitude rather than external unconstraint movements but that the quality of mind cannot develop without a fair leeway of movements in

explanation, experimentation, application an so on. It is unreasonable to doubt the importance of the environment and the society for the realization of one's full capabilities even in thought as in action. The role of culture which serves as the stepping-stone for thought and which is a common heritage for all makes it impossible for any individual to stand outside the society. It is an undoubted fact, that thinking does originate only in the individual mind but it is mainly the social situation that can trigger it off, the process itself goes on inside the individual but the product of it enriches the individual and the society. The harmonizing agent of the individual and the society is Education. It plays an important role in creating a conducive relationship between the individuals and the society. The two are undoubtedly inseparable, one cannot exist without the other, neither does each exist in utter independence of the other. The individual and the society exist in a sort of experimental continuum. Thinking is not an end in itself, it is a means by which social relations may be understood and more intelligently ordered. This is one of the roles education has to play. As Dewey (1916) puts it, the heart of the sociality of man is in education. The freedom of man lies in education. Education makes it possible to traverse the dualism of the individual and the society to arrive at a continuum. Specifically education is necessary for the individual to express his freedom intelligently and with foresight, to organize and interact with his environment and it helps to free individual capacity in a progressive growth. It is equally necessary to say that it is the right type of education which is the democratic type that is needed because if it is just any education, there is no guarantee that the individual's freedom is automatically assured, especially when it is realized that in spite of its great and immense benefits, more and more education has also resulted in more and more subtle weapons of control of the individual.

Perhaps the greatest source of optimism is in the power of individual's intellectual and moral freedom, which intelligently exercised makes it possible for individuals to feel free in spite of all odds. It is partly in this sense that Dewey (1916) optimizing about education is understandable. The individual, society and education are inseparable, society develops individual through education and individual also often receiving sound education, contributes to the social, political, economic, spiritual and cultural development of the society. To realize a democratic society, democratic education is the answer and an antidote to political crisis.

Education as agent of democracy: The value of education is underlined by the fact that each society establishes an educational system designed to serve its present and

future needs that is to say to serve as an instrument for stability on one hand and on the other as an instrument of change and renewal. Thus in every such system, the transmission of knowledge's and values which the educational institutions impact are those of the larger society and the morality of the school is a reflection of that society in which the school is a part. The value of education as a social institution is therefore incontrovertible and is second to none.

It is undoubted fact that education is a catalyst for change. The supreme example in this connection is the USSR which, starting as a comparatively backward country by the time of the October 1917 Bolshevik Revolution took itself in hand revolutionized its educational system along with its social economic substructure and subsequently within a generation became one of the world's super powers, signaling her ascendancy by inaugurating the space age with sputnik in 1957. Paradoxically, Nigeria had for nearly five decades of independence now failed to establish a functional steel complex talk less of organizing a credible, free and fair election. Every election year has always been a tug of war or rather do or die affair for how long shall we continue to live with all these political aberrations? The role of education in resolving all these democratic anomalies becomes imperative. Infact, the purpose of education reflects in such matters as running a viable, popular and genuinely democratic political system, maintaining law and order, holding just and fair elections, establishing a scientifically oriented and technologically developed society and so on. For instance, 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 have no commitment to democracy, they lacked the etiquette of democratic values, they have never experienced democracy and know neither its philosophy nor its history. The colonial education bequeathed to the nation is another worrisome issue. Education that was aimed at training exploiters, oppressors, cheaters and election riggers. As matter of fact, education as an institution is primarily a means designed to serve the ends of society, the ultimate end in this connection being national development for how long should we continue to talk of Nigeria being a developing or underdeveloped nation after five decades of independence? The education should be able to mobilize the citizenry politically, socially and even technologically.

It is important to note that features of democratic elections anywhere in the world include compilation of a credible register of eligible voters, freedom by all the participating political parties to hold rallies without any fear of attack, freedom of speech and press as well as

universal suffrage. Unfortunately, Nigeria elections have fallen short of these requirements right from the time of independence. What has the educational system do in this regard. Education as an agent of change has not been able to change many Nigerians politically to understand the nature of democracy as it is being practiced in other developed countries of the world.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As Plato warned many centuries ago, the human race would never see the end of trouble until true lovers of wisdom should or the holders of political power should, by some divine appointment' become true lover of wisdom.

What role can education play in resolving the platonic paradox which is real rather than imaginary in contemporary Nigerian society. The predicament of most Nigerians is subjection to the rule not necessarily of the best and brightest or even of the most constitutionally legitimate but to that of the person or cabal in control of the forces of coercion either through guns or money.

General Olusegun Obasanjo as a military head of state in his Jaji declaration of 12 September 1977 said. The Nigerian society as at now in spite of our efforts since July, 1975 is not sufficiently disciplined, fair, just or human.

Ironically, the same Obsanjo as a civilian president in one of his political rallies declared election to be do or die affair. How do we reconcile these two statements from the same person who has a divine opportunity of ruling Nigerian twice.

In juxtaposing education and democracy, it is pertinent for someone to see education as one of the most effective means of preparing students for true democracy. In other words, democracy should be taught through schooling, which is an agent of education. Schooling should assist young people in understanding democracy and democratic values inherent in democracy.

Education for democratic values needs to move beyond functionalist and vocationalist-oriented perspectives on schooling (which stress education for jobs) to one where the traditional model of schooling becomes a transformational pedagogy. Nigerian youth must be prepared for active participation in the act of governance and this means we have a responsibility to teach for democracy. Democratic education moves beyond traditionalist and essentially practice by suggesting that students and teachers are active and equal participants in all school activities. It is expedient to have school equipment programme that supports the purchases of up-to-date computerized equipment, tailored

to Nigeria democratic needs and possibilities, this is going to have a significant educational impact that would increase the political values in which Nigerian population is deficient. This school equipment programme should aim at having positive impact on education in a country in which most of her population has a defective political orientation and culture. Before Nigeria could move for a stable political theory that would bring the required result, we should think about a functional and pragmatic education as suggested by Dewey (1916). This is education for conscientization and awareness as postulated by Paulo Freire since everybody in Nigeria has the right to participate in the building and reconstructive maintenance of a society called politics, everybody therefore has to attend this saving and moral university of conscientization.

It is an undoubted fact that education provide a moral framework and a cultural context in which Nigerians is both define themselves and address the question, what constitutes true democracy? As a matter of fact, education system in Nigeria has been undermined by a series of political sentiments that make the implementation of the National Policy on education unrealizable and unachievable. Debates about education reform reveal the fundamental concerns, uncertainties and tensions which pre-occupy the mind of Nigerians as they struggle to adapt to technological changes that become the order of the day in the world over, this however is manifested in the campaign for globalization.

Nigerians need to be prepared for the increasing cultural diversity and develop the capacity to think critically about democratic values they encounter in different facets of their lives. This critical thinking as provided by education is the basic for true democracy.

William Kyle once said that the true manifestation of successful schooling is not how well students perform on in-school assessments. How citizens think, what they value, how analytical and critical they can be, how they question and reflect. These are among the true measures of successful schooling. Therefore in the realization of democratic education, schooling plays a very significant role especially in the area of critical and analytical thinking, when it comes to the study of party manifestos and political party programmes and even in the process of election and voting exercise. Nigerian citizenry need to be mobilized for democratic education in order to produce people who possess the capacity to think critically to evaluate issues perceptively and to learn continuously. As a matter of fact the education should concentrate more time in teaching people not only the theory of democracy but the development of purely democratic society. In this wise the education should equally produce a good citizen

who is knowledgeable, skilled, with good behaviour and capable of improving his society better than he met it, somebody that is democratically conscious and morally balanced.

Somebody who abhors rigging and election frauds like leprosy. The education should inadvertently develop an autonomously thinking, socially responsible democratic citizen in other word the education should aim at the cultivation of reflective thinking for social problems solving, democratic citizenship and growth.

CONCLUSION

Education that aims at the total development of man has a significant role to play in the political emancipation of man. To liberate man from political bondage, education as an instrument of change becomes highly imperative. Thus the type of education one has in mind is a qualitative and functional education. Education that aims at conscientisation is therefore recommended. It is important therefore to note that the fabrication of a civil state finds expression in a worth-while governing structure that conscientiously include everybody at the level of respecting the dignity of his human person. The collective psyche of respective individual should be recognized having formed them in a relative common conscientious school for a collective and progressive goal.

The Education should involve the type of political education that imbibes the type of democracy that is Nigerianised and this should recognize the society at large. As a matter of fact the society has to enlist the service of a collective and functional psyche. And this is necessary since men achieve moral fulfillment only as participants in the collective self government process, helping to give expression to the General will for the common good, failure in this constitutes failure in one's moral duty as a citizen. The duty of the individual for the good of the collectivity is an expression of solidarity to the benefit of the society's body politic. The success of the individual operator that has the collective success at heart contributes immensely to the functional progress of a whole social moral, economic and political universal set up. To bring about this everybody in the society has to be groomed in the features of democratic values which include freedom of association and participation in the formation of political parties, freedom of speech and press as well as universal suffrage Education for conscientisation that had earlier on been recommended would make election rigging, falsification of figures political thuggery highly immoral and criminal. This types of education would make everybody to know the implications of what he is doing. That is knowing the right

thing to do at the right time, knowing the right person and party to vote for in election. Cultivation and the development of the culture of free and fair election which is an element of a good Democratic process. Finally we cannot contest the fact that Africans in general and Nigerians in particular are metaphorically in political hell and to get out of this hell, we need a revitalized education that imbibes Democratic values in the national life.

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