
**SOCIAL STUDIES AS A VERITABLE TOOL FOR
MAINTAINING DEMOCRATIC STABILITY IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

The paper examined Social Studies as a veritable tool for maintaining democratic stability in Nigeria. Social Studies is a key subject in the Nigeria school curriculum in its main objectives seek to achieve peace, security and good governance in the society at large. It also raises citizens' expectations and yearnings in anticipation of democratic dividend. Free and fair elections were also discussed as the pathway to a free and egalitarian society that upholds democratic principles. Democracy is seen as a peaceful means of power transfer in a free and fair manner with the majority deciding the political path hereby ensuring long-term democratic stability in societies. Election malpractice is an anomaly and all paths through which incapable individuals who lack the basic requirements of citizenship education embark to achieve their desperate selfish political goal by all means and consequently endangering the stability of democratic practices and the peace of the country Nigeria. The paper concluded with emphasis that Social Studies education which remains a veritable tool for maintaining democratic stability in

Nigeria must also charge itself with more responsibilities to remain relevant in the new world order.

Keywords: Social Studies, Democracy, Elections, Electoral malpractice.

Introduction

Social Studies as a subject have continued to show its relevance in the society through the inculcation of the right values, attitudes and norms on citizens with citizenship education. Citizens given the right civic education which is manifested in their approach to national issues are of inmate value to the country at large. Democracy and democratic practice have come to dominate all other ideologies on governance. Liberalism and equality of all as entrenched in a democracy are demonstrated by the acts of elections to usher in leaders to positions. In this case, as witnessed in Nigeria, where political contenders do all sorts of electoral malpractice to get to the office is appalling. Social Studies is indeed a veritable tool in curbing this menace. With the forthcoming 2023 general elections our role as Social Studies experts must be heard where we can help to set the pace and focus with proper citizen education. Where citizens are properly enlightened and groomed through the basic nationalistic outlook, the better for the society at large.

Citizenship education as stated by Jibrin, Alfa and Abuh (2014) is a concept many scholars say denotes the training process whereby the citizens are kept abreast of their political roles in society. It is an educational process, formal and/or informal, through which the citizens get acquainted with the basic requirements of good citizenship. Citizenship education which is a component of Social Studies is an essential ingredient if the democratic dividend is to be enjoyed by the populace. A proper citizen education is embedded in a well-articulated civic education.

Social Studies is an important component of adult education that equips citizens with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitude to participate in the public life of a democracy, to know their rights and discharge their responsibilities as expected by being responsive to acts of governance. Social Studies uses the term civic education

to cover the larger job of educating citizens to take responsibility for their roles within democratic states and exercise their rights as free human beings. Civic education seeks to make people powerful and capable of participating to the fullest in a democratic society and create a democratic society (Branson, 1998).

Kanaev (2000) went further to emphasize that education promotes recipients' understanding of the political system, their interests, and options to contribute to government, or citizens' rights and obligations. Civic education may also involve "exposing students to central and political traditions of the nation" and teaching them "moral sentiments". It is also argued that as a more personal type of civic knowledge, knowing one's rights is the first step, or a prerequisite, for participation and civic education or citizenship education should therefore not be restricted to the four walls of a classroom but should be targeted at all those regarded as adults in the segment of the society (Ruita, 2007).

In rural parts of the developing world including Nigeria, most citizens have not been formally schooled to have required exposure, not even to out-of-school organised learning processes either. For Finkel (2005), civic education includes school-based civics and programmes that provide instruction about the social and political rights of women, [or] voter education programmes, neighbourhood problem-solving programmes through group discussions that bring individuals in contact with local authorities for purposes of promoting collective action to benefit local communities.

Aroge (2012) stated the following as constituting the main focus of civic education: to introduce citizens to the basic rules and institutional features, principles and practices of democratic political systems; to convey a specific set of values such as political tolerance, trust in the democratic process, respect for the rule of law, and compromise; and to encourage responsible and informed political participation. All these forms the focus of this paper. Therefore, the paper explores Social Studies, approaches to civic education, elements of electoral malpractices from the Nigeria perspective, and the importance of Social Studies to sustainable democracy and makes some recommendations towards entrenching a sustainable democratic system in Nigeria.

Conceptual Issues

An election is a process in a democracy where people are given the choice to choose who represents them at which level of governance. Democracy has come to be generally accepted as the level of standard government in any civilized society. This is as expressed by IDEA (2001) when it said Democracy is about local people being in charge of their lives, being able to take charge of their resources and making power flow from them and not the other way around. To this end, Nnoli (1986) posited that:

An election may be defined as the manner of choice agreed upon by a group of people which enables them to select one or a few people out of many to occupy one or several authority positions. This manner of choice usually involves rules and regulations designed to ensure a certain degree of fairness and justice to all concerned. It is the most modern form of recruitment of personnel into public offices, and is deemed to be a very crucial aspect of the democratic process; irrespective of the type of democracy that is practised (pp. 144).

Nnoli (1986) in giving strong support to democracy hinted that, no matter how democracy is understood, interpreted or practised, it has a generally agreed upon philosophical justification premised on certain universally cherished human values and ideals: freedom; equity, and justice. Even critics of democracy Adamu (1999) submitted that democracy does not take root easily and is full of shortcomings but it remains still the least evil of many forms of government in our time.

The idea of the liberal democrats has come to stay and worldwide it remains the standard of accessing the political life of a group of people. This is also not forgetting the popular Greek definition by Abraham Lincoln former American President that democracy is a government of the people by the people and for the people. Appadorai in Danladi (2016) described democracy as a system of government under which the people exercise the governing power directly or through representatives and periodically elected by themselves.

Danladi (2016) further enumerated the major yardstick for

measuring democracy as the rule of law, fundamental human rights, mass participation and principles of separation of powers. Elections remain vital in any democratic process but it is not just any election but a free and fair election. Free and Fair Elections have been so closely tied to the growth and development of a representative democratic government that they are now generally held to be the single most important indicator of the presence or absence of a democratic government.

Electoral malpractice includes any illegal means through which a particular candidate takes undue advantage of his political opponents, with or without the support of the state apparatus. All forms of electoral irregularities such as rigging, and snatching of ballot boxes. Political violence or political terrorism, etc. need to be condemned in all ways. Amadu Kurfi (2005) noted that rigging is the manipulation of the electoral process to the advantage of a particular candidate or political party, which can be perpetuated at any level of the electoral process from the delimitation of the constituencies to the adjudication of election disputes and that even the promulgation of the electoral law could be subject to abuse by partisan administration or bureaucracy...”

Ibrahim (2007) listed forms of electoral malpractice which he called electoral fraud in Nigeria to include, compilation of fictitious names on voters' registers, illegal compilation of separate voters' lists, abuses of the voter registration revision exercise, illegal printing of voters' cards, illegal possession of ballot boxes, stuffing of ballot boxes with ballot papers, falsification of election results, illegal thumb-printing of ballot papers, under-aged voting, illegal printing of the forms used for collation and declaration of election results, deliberate refusal to supply election materials to certain areas, announcing results in places where no elections were held, unauthorized announcement of election results, harassment of candidates, agents and voters, change of list of electoral officials, ballot box-switching and inflation of figures, and so on.

Kyari in Jega (2007) said electoral fraud is the single most potent threat to democratic transition in Nigeria. For Umar (2003) in the realm of politics, rigging of election is the worst form of political violence thus, undermining a democratic process and endangering

the security of the state, and the stability of the economy and provoking life-threatening subsidiary physical violence. INEC is the body charged with the following duties as stated in the 1999 constitution of the federal of Nigeria as amended and also re-enforced in the new Electoral Act of 2022.

Relevance of Social Studies in Curbing Electoral Malpractice

Many of the individuals privileged to be in authority do often see the position as their given right and opportunity of a lifetime to amass wealth and property at the detriment of the masses who voted them into office. Salihu (2004) stated in the same vein when he noted that:

Those who control state power in Nigeria see the state as a 'spoil system' the control of which guarantees their continued accumulation of wealth, sustains their existence, survival, and reproduction through primitive accumulation and political clientelism. The pattern and type of politics which political clientelism breeds are essentially extractive. With the capture of political power, patrons perceive themselves to be in charge of an arena as a source of wealth, benefits, and the disbursement of patronage. This perception of politics encourages a zero-sum approach to politics in which the winners take all to appease their backers, and to make use of their positions before other patrons take control and divert resources to their ends.

Where Social Studies is given its rightful place a lot of political reorientation must take place and must be put into practice. Social Studies is a means to achieving citizenship education through ensuring political socialization in learners according to Tapper (1976) by playing several roles which include the followings:

Promotion of Civil Awareness: Social Studies helps pupils, learners/students and citizens of a nation to learn their basic rights, obligations and responsibilities as stipulated in the nation's constitution. For the promotion of comprehensive political education, Social Studies covers the three main domains of learning, affective,

cognitive and psychomotor. On training of citizenship, Okam (2008) asserted that Social Studies constitute one of the curricular arrangements accepted for laying, a strong foundation to create effective citizens. Social Studies help in the inculcation of basic societal norms. Hence, it is believed that educational establishments are designed to socialize children into acceptance of basic societal norms and beliefs.

The major task of formal political education in Nigeria rests in Social Studies. Aroge (2012) also listed the importance and relevance of civic education in our country Nigeria to include; political knowledge: Through civic education, people would gain knowledge about politics and governance and become responsive and responsible citizens in society to know why they should. Political participation is a way to measure a democratic government's legitimacy. Civic education, if properly organized, would make politics and political participation to be efficacious in the lives of people. A democratic system of government is no doubt a distinct system with peculiar norms and values.

Conclusion

This exposition has been on the effect of Social Studies in being a veritable tool for maintaining democratic stability and curbing electoral malpractices in Nigeria. In a democratic setting like our country Nigeria, we cannot aspire to elevate our status from the bottom billion if we continue to indulge ourselves in all these forms of electoral fraud. To move from "bottom to top" and establish ourselves in the committee of civilized worlds such as America, the need to address and holistically resolve societal issues gave rise to the study of Social Studies with emphasis also placed on citizenship education. This is practicalized in the everyday lives of its citizens with their nationalistic approach to state matters. As enumerated above the role of Social Studies is very critical and essential in ridding society of political shenanigans, lacking in the basics of civic education that is critical to peace and stability of a nation on which the dividend of democracy can get to the citizens.

Suggestions

Social Studies professionals must begin to play an active role in the political dispensation in Nigeria. For instance, as accredited election neutral observers in subsequent elections. Social Studies professionals must lead in the discussion of improvement in the overall social and moral transformation in society. Social Studies professionals must make conscious moves from gown to town. They can be more relevant and taken seriously if the populace sees the practicality of Social Studies's effect on their lives not just as a subject. Regular political process enlightenment and working with all stakeholders. Playing curriculum politics with the policymakers to allow for Social Studies to be taught and examined at the senior secondary school level.

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