

BUILDING A CIVIL SOCIETY: A MANDATE FOR SOCIAL STUDIES

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Abstract

In Nigeria today, one of the important goals of the government, governmental and non-governmental agency (NGO) is how to build a society where there would be tolerance, honesty, respect for human dignity and patriotism. To achieve this, there is the need to inculcate in the citizens those values and traits for effective citizenship. This paper focuses on the roles of Social Studies education in civil and citizenship training. The fact that social studies curriculum is integrated with gender education, character education, peace education, and population education e.t.c this qualifies Social Studies to be machinery for building a civil society. This paper focuses on some issues and problems that constitute setback to the cultivation of a civil society. Among other things, the non-implementation of Social Studies education at the Nigerian senior secondary school serves as hindrance for the attainment of effective citizenship. It is recommended in this paper that the teaching of Social Studies should be given a priority and concern in the Nigeria School.

Introduction

The creation of a civil society is a great task that requires effective civil training. Falade (2001) observed that to a large extent lack of the required citizenship traits in the life of the Nigerian citizens has directly or indirectly been responsible for disintegration, disunity and conflicts in the country.

Contemporary events and problems in Nigeria and other parts of the world call for the creation of a civil society. This can be accomplished by preparing the younger generation for effective citizenship through our school programmes. The re-emphasizing of Social Studies as a core subject into the school curriculum is meant to achieve this purpose.

Social Studies education in Nigeria started since 1963. The reason for introducing the subject is to develop civic traits in the learner. The focus of this paper is to examine the extent to which Social Studies education can help the child to acquire those civil values and traits needed for building a civil society. The paper will also consider some of the fundamental problems that constitutes some set backs to the attainment of civil training through the Nigeria Social Studies Programme.

Why we need civic training in Nigeria

Civic refers to the citizen or people living in a place. Citizenship does not only mean membership of a given state, but is also connotes that such a citizen or member is vested with some right and duties. Two categories of citizens can be found in every society. The bad and good citizen. (Falade 2004) McClendon

(1982) cited in Ogundere (2000) explained that a good citizen is a person who does not just vote but considers that action as a serious matter and cast his ballot thoughtfully: who does not abuse the freedoms he has, nor interfere with the rights of others. A good citizen is law abiding loyal to the nation, he participate and contribute positively to the progress of the political system. Therefore, the building of a civil society requires effective civic training.

The present state of our country calls for conscious and concerted effort towards the cultivation of a civic society. The increasing level of incivility and undemocratic practices constitute serious set back to the attainment and sustainable of democratic culture in Nigeria. Many Nigerians have little or no concern for the civic society. There is neglect of civil duties by the citizens. The raw and file of this country exhibits intolerance, dishonesty and other natures of bad behavior.

Public officers and political leaders in Nigeria are found of different forms of corruption, disregard to public opinion, selfishness etc. our police and law enforcement agents practice extrajudicial killing, extortion, bribery and denial of human right. There are some basic value of civic responsibilities that are not displayed among Nigerians. Some of these values are patriotism, obedience, tolerance, honesty, morality, discipline etc, indiscipline and intolerance have causes a lot of socio- economic and religious problems in Nigeria. For instance, it was in this country that we got a serving minister in one of the Federal Ministries in Nigeria that bribed the top members of parliament with reasonable amount of money so as to have his budget sail through when it got to them.

Mansaray and Adeyemi (2002) stated that moment global issues in the past few decades have brought into sharp focus the critical question on how to ensure a sustainable future for human kind. Prominent amount these issues is the continuing denial of true democracy, violations of human right and the rise of ethnic and religious conflict and violence. Ogundere (2002) pointed out in at some specific citizenship responsibilities have been abandoned by Nigerian political leaders. He further argued that the abandonment of the sacred citizenship responsibilities by our leaders and the followers are responsible for the great economic and political ills in the nation.

Citizenship training has become fundamental machinery for the civilization of civil society in various parts of the world, there is then the need to have consciously and carefully develop in citizens those values and skills that will enable them to have concern for public life. Then is the need for the citizens to participate and contribute positively to the political process. Omosaye (1999) believe that there are certain fundamental attitudes expected of all in the society. These include truth, respect for persons and feeling of fraternity for others as persons, Every citizens ought to cultivate right attitudes and beliefs, so as to conform with societal norms.

Education is an important tool for citizenship training. Education should aim at preparing the young for a mature life ruled by reasons.

Hence, subjects in Nigeria curriculum should concentrate on truth and justice, this helps to build in the child right from an early age, dedication and responsible attitude towards work.

In the light of this, the objectives of the Nigerian National Policy on Education are:

- To build a free and democratic society
- To build a just and egalitarian society
- To build a united and self-reliant nation
- To build a great and dynamic economy;
- To build a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens.

Commenting on these objectives, Erezene (1999) pointed out that to achieve the first objective (i.e to build a free and democratic society) require a training on democratic etiquette's and respect for others. Also to attain a just and egalitarian society, the training of the citizens should make them to realize that all are equal irrespective of language, culture or locality of origin. Generally, these objectives, which constitute our national philosophy for education and other aspects of life, clearly aim at making the individual a good effective citizen of the country.

Some Constraints to the Achievement of Civic Training through Social Studies Education

Social Studies is seen as one of the major subject that can help to inculcate civil traits in the learners. This is the reason why subject like civics, citizenship education, political education etc. have been integrated into the Nigeria Social Studies curriculum. The integration of these disciplines into the Social Studies curriculum. The integrated of these discipline into the Social Studies curriculum becomes possible due to the relative and flexible nature of the subject.

The above notwithstanding, certain problems in the Nigeria Society constitute a constraint to the attainment of effective civic training through Social Studies education. Falade (1997) expressed that it could be disturbing that despite the strong emphasis placed on the development of good citizenship through Social Studies education, the subject has not fully realized this goal. He pointed out that there are cases where final year Social Studies students are discipline for examination malpractices while some are alleged of one social misconduct or the other such as cultism, thurgery, violence, stealing etc.

One other hindrance to the realization of effective civic training via the education sector- even through the national policy on education stated that civic training is one of the major goals of the school system, yet civic values and traits are not well emphasized. But up till now, the teaching of Social Studies is not implemented at the senior secondary school level. Also, the time allocated for the teaching of Social Studies at the elementary school is not sufficient for the effective attainment of the goals of the subject. As a result of this, Social Studies teachers use the little available time to emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge to the detriment of values and skills acquisition.

Lastly, the problem of bad leadership in this country is a serious problem to the attainment of civic training, money politics, assassination, election rigging, ethnic militias, abuse of power, corruption, indiscipline etc., characterized the Nigerian society. What students learn in the classroom, as the right values are the direct opposite of what operates in the larger society. Most learners nowadays receive instructions just for the sake of passing examination alone.

Recommendations

To develop good citizenship through Social Studies education in Nigeria, the following recommendations are very important.

Civic training should be made the main target of the Nigeria education system. The teaching and learning of civic values and traits should be made compulsory at the various levels of the school system. The implementation of Social Studies programmes at the senior secondary school level should not be delayed and longer.

Also, there is need to allocate more time for the teaching of Social Studies particularly in our elementary school this will help Social Studies teachers to properly teach the various issues and concepts in the subject.

Also, effective, training of Social Studies teachers is paramount for civic training in Nigeria. Social Studies training programme in our college of education and other teacher training institute should be design to enable student teachers to acquire necessary skills that can help them to promote civic training at the elementary schools. Teacher trainers in Nigerian higher institutions should adopt Child- Centered methods SO as TO equip the student teachers with the inherent values in such method

Conclusion

This paper discussed the need for the cultivation of civic society in Nigeria; because this is paramount for eradicating the high level of incivility in Nigeria. This will enable the Nigerian citizens to acquire civic values like honesty, tolerance, patience, discipline, cooperation, hard work etc. The manifestation of these civic values is fundamental for building the civil society.

It is also revealed in this paper that one of the major aims of Social Studies education in Nigeria is to equip the learners with the necessary civil values and traits. This will enable them to contribute positively to the cultivation of the civic society.

However, Social Studies is faced with some problems in Nigeria. This has caused set back to the extent to which Social Studies could have helped in building the civic society. In this period, the effective teaching of the subject at every level of Nigeria education system must highly be emphasized.

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