

Social Studies Education as a Tool for Checks and Balances to Political Irregularities and Franchise in Nigeria

Okogu, J. O.
Umudjere, S. O.

ABSTRACT

This study examines social studies education as a tool for checks and balances to political irregularities and franchise in Nigeria. The aim is to explore how social studies education can be used in correcting political irregularities in exercising franchise in Nigeria. Social studies education is concerned with citizenship education which entails a complex process of inculcating societal norms, morals, knowledge, skills and values that serve as checks and balances to political irregularities and franchise. Based on this premise, social studies education emphasizes the acquisition of the relevant skills, knowledge, values and beliefs and other capabilities that are significant in conformity with the checking of political irregularities as been observed in exercising political franchise. Social studies education is transformative in contents, objectives and accommodates contemporary issues, social issues, environmental issues, and most especially political matters for the purposes of re-organizing political structure in society.

Keywords: *Social Studies, checks and balances, political irregularities and franchise*

INTRODUCTION

The objective of social studies education in Nigeria is to inculcate into the citizenry, knowledge, values and attitudes that are relevant in emphasizing citizenship education among the electorates and the political class in Nigeria. Citizenship education is a process of preparing and equipping Nigeria citizens for better internalization of true democracy for the citizens to be legally minded and socially inclined in practicing and exercising their political rights and as well in selecting their conscientious leaders into various political offices without the disenfranchising any Nigerian citizen that is 18 years and above as enshrined conspicuously in Chapter IV of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999). Nigeria is a political entity that is in recent times experiencing various political irregularities and disenfranchised of her citizens right to vote and be voted for. This political abnormally has eaten deep into the tender political growth and development of the country's democracy. It is obvious as shown in the past and present political elections in the country, several irregularities such as imposition of candidates both at political election primaries and the general political electioneering processes in the country. These irregularities

Okogu, J. O., Ph.D is a Lecturer in the Department of Social Science Education, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria while **Umudjere, S. O.** is of the Faculty of Education, University of Benin, Benin-City, Nigeria.

have polarized Nigeria's true democracy as the right to vote and be voted for is being hindered with the presence of political leaders imposing their choiced candidates at the neglect of the electorates. This has inhibited political values such as honesty, patriotism, nationalism, the rule of law and processes of law that are of necessity for true political development processes of a country. Political irregularities such as exercising political franchise are facts that are established due to the corrupt practices and greedy nature of the political class. They are common features that even our contemporary youths adopt them as norms of attaining political heights in Nigeria.

The younger generation sees it as a normal way of life that is used to secure power into offices irrespective of their eligibility for such positions. The youths despise the adverse consequences of these irregularities due to the nature of tendencies such as greed, corruption, fraud, arson and pride which the political class has laid down . Nigerian have suffered enormous attacks from the irregularities that are been practiced by the political leaders and this have stand as a barrier to normal growth and development of the Nigerian economy. If the adverse effects of these irregularities and political disenfranchise as been perpetrated by the political elites are not checked, it will derail and disrupt the progress of Nigeria's true democracy.

Social studies education therefore serves as a means of curbing this social menace in the country, as against active, vibrant and true political practices in Nigeria. Social studies Education emphasizes citizenship education in its nature, scope and contents Citizenship education is a process of preparing and equipping the Nigerian citizens for positive and successful living in the Nigerian complex societies. It assists in disseminating the necessary knowledge needed in correcting political abnormalities that are not in conformity with true democracy. Citizenship education calls for a medium through which the electorates are made to be conscious of their fundamental political rights as well as moral rights that emancipate a growing society like Nigeria. This study is therefore structured to evaluate social studies education as a tool for checks and balances to political irregularities and franchise in Nigeria.

Social Studies Education and Franchise in Nigeria

Social Studies Education is a vital concept that entails the critical study of man's interaction with his environment, how man influences his political environment and in turn influenced by his political environment. The importance of social studies education is to project and disseminate valuable knowledge that are suitable for addressing the challenges confronting the electorates in the present fast changing political society. In order to correct the political irregularities processes, which include disenfranchisement, adequate recognition of the fundamental political rights of Nigerians to enable them exercise their political rights and franchise that will enhance the growth of democracy in the country is necessary. Therefore, social studies education creates in the mind of the citizens their political responsibilities and rights including the right to vote and be voted for without undue interference by the political leaders in the Nigerian society (Osakwe and Itedjere, 2005). Akinlaye (2003) supports this view, when he states that social studies education creates awareness and understanding

in our ever-evolving social and political environment. Therefore, social studies education has the mandate to create the political norms in the minds of all Nigerians that emanates an evolvment of better atmosphere that is necessary for the electorates in putting in place true democracy in Nigeria. Political franchise is the rights and privileges that empower the citizenry of a country to participate fully in the electoral process. It is the fundamental rights and privileges that are bequeathed to all Nigerians within the age limit of 18 years and above irrespective of their sex to perform their political civic rights. It is equally the rights and privileges that eligible Nigerian citizens have to vote and be voted for during elections that are conducted in the country. Political franchise are legal rights that are due to an individuals who are qualified to take part in the selection of their leaders, representatives into various levels of political offices in the country. It is a right bequeathed to a Nigerian who is crime-free, mentally sane and of eighteen years and above, as well as a member of the country either by birth or by nationalization.

It is the right of the citizens of Nigeria who possess the political attributes and qualification in any country. The attributes and qualifications of the citizens are derived from the constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria. It depends on the government's decision but most democratic governments do not bequeathed the rights to vote or to be voted for based on sex or race. Resident aliens one allowed to exercise their franchise provided they meet up with the requirements of the Constitution irrespective of sex or race. For instance, some members of the European Union and common wealth of nations led credence to the above information (Wikipedia of suffrage, 2014). Political franchise is a right specially conferred on a group of people or individuals as in the Nigerian constitution by the Nigerian government, most especially privileges are to be extended to eligible voters without disenfranchisement; by participating in choosing their political office seekers. Williamson (1960) supports the above view when he posits that in politics, franchise is the right conferred on individuals to vote, without restrictions as stated in the constitution of the United States of America. In the same vein, Vaughn (1974) lend credence to the view of Williams when he explained that some States in the United States of America posses some constitution that governs the qualifications of voters. Political franchise in Nigeria is synonymous with the emergence of political parties that led to the selection of leaders in the country and franchise has to be on and continue to be except there is military intervention in governance.

POLITICAL IRREGULARITIES IN NIGERIA

The attainment of independence by Nigeria as a sovereign state in 1960 is synonymous to the evolvment of political parties which is the genesis of the political activities in the country. These political parties are the active participants of the Nigerian political process and the creators of political irregularities. Irregularities are inculcated in the citizens by the various political elite that are themselves characterized with fraudulent acts such as, electoral rigging, stealing of ballot boxes, thuggery etc. Political irregularity is a phenomenon that has encouraged the selection of irresponsible and tyrannous leaders as representatives of the masses. The act of irregularities in exercising political franchise by the Nigeria's people

has polarized Nigerian democracy because the ruling class hijacked the political rights of the masses for their own exclusive rights against the interests and caprices of the electorates. It is an act that are controlled by some segments of the populace who are in a cabal by nomenclature otherwise referred to as elites while some few others believe in regular exercise of political franchise. In Nigeria, the political franchise of the people can be said to be irregular in the political terrain as the people are deprived of their legal rights to cast their votes for their choiced representatives. Irregularities in exercising political franchise are facts that are established due to the corrupt practices and greedy nature of the political class. The political leaders who are in power are power drunk and as such exercise their powers without due political process, thus, claim power as their rights to perpetuate their stay in their various offices.

Irregularities in exercising political franchise in Nigeria encourage the electorates and deny them their rights to select their choice leaders. The Phenomenon includes rigging of election, secret thumb printing in private homes, carrying and stealing of ballot boxes right in the presence of security officials as well as hiring of political thugs to harass and intimidate the electorates to forcefully support them in their anti political activities that are against the wish of the electorates. These are acts that are characterized with democracy in Nigeria. Political irregularities are not associated with political office seekers alone but are associated as well with religious leaders, traditional rulers and community leaders. They help and abate irregularities for the selfish interest of political office seekers at the expense of the masses. These class of Nigerians suppose to advocate good morals, norms, societal values and custodian of the rights and privileges of the masses. They advocate and practice political immorality, disseminate same to their followers in their various communities and societies. It is important to note that as religious leaders, traditional rulers, community leaders, they are not supposed to be advocates of political immoralities because of financial benefits.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Social studies education teaches morals; disseminate information, knowledge, skills, right attitudes that are used to re-shapen negative attitude towards political irregularities in the country. It is therefore important that all lovers of true democracy should abide by the transformational content of social studies education. Based on the above, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Nigerian politicians should imbibe the culture of citizenship education that social studies education advocates.
- ii. Political leaders and their associates, religious leaders, traditional rulers and their subordinates should abide by the political values, skills, knowledge of true democracy as been advocated by social studies education.
- iii. The contents of social studies education should sensitize the Independent Electoral Commission as an independent body to abide by political electoral processes.

REFERENCES

- Akinlaye, F. A.** (2003). *Fundamentals of social studies curriculum planning and instruction*. Lagos: Pumark Nigeria limited
- Federal Government of Nigeria** (1999). *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*. Lagos: Government Press.
- Osakwe, E. O. and Itedjere, P. O.** (2005). (Eds.). *Social Studies for Tertiary Students in Nigeria*. Benin: Justice Jeco Press and Publishers limited.
- Vaughn, C. C.** (1974). *Franchise in America. The Columbia electronic Encyclopedia* (6th edition). Columbia: University Press
- Williamson, C.** (1960) *American suffrage from property to Democracy, 1760-1860. The Columbia Encyclopedia* (6th Edition). Columbia: University Press.
- Wikipedia** of suffrage, retrieved on 30th August, 2014