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Citizenship Education as a Panacea for Political Stability in Nigeria

Koku, Usman Ugboga

Department of Social Sciences

Nasarawa State Polytechnic Lafia

E-mail: usmanu.koku@gmail.com

Tel: +2348035983162

Abstract

Nigeria today is grappling with political instability which is due to the socio-economic and political crisis which pushes the citizens to struggle to protect and promote their interests. This struggle by the citizens is a threat to the political stability of Nigeria. In order to address this prevailing condition, the paper believed that citizenship education is a veritable tool for solving the problem of political instability in Nigeria. The paper adopted descriptive and content analysis method. The paper opined that lack of political stability in Nigeria is due to lack of adequate attention to citizenship education in the country. The aim of this paper therefore, is to examine the role of citizenship education as a panacea for political stability in Nigeria and suggest how it could be realized.

Key Words: citizenship education, political stability, governance

Introduction

The return to civil rule in Nigeria on May 29, 1999 was welcomed with excitement after the prolonged years of military rule. However, the country has been battling with series of challenges since then. The political instability can be described as violent crisis or coercive behaviour exhibited by individual persons or group of individuals which results to destruction of lives and property, affecting local government, state and the country at large (Jimoh & Ojalabi, 2006). The political instability Nigeria is facing ranges from Sharia crisis, Niger Delta militancy, the Boko Haram, Herdsmen and farmers clashes, ethno religious conflicts, electoral and post-election violence and politically motivated killings (Alfa, 2012).

Similarly, Jimoh (2004) cited by Jimoh and Ojelabi (2006) opined that problems facing the civil rule in Nigeria include armed robbing, assassination, bribery and corruption, appointing persons of incompetent and questionable character in public offices and lack of respect for people's right through intimidation and thuggery. Adejumobi (2001) endorsed that "lack of commitment to the virtues of honesty, equality, social justice, accountability, trust, peaceful coexistence among co-ethnics and respect for human rights" also accounted for the political instability in Nigeria. The wide spread of poverty and un-employment in the country (Ona, 2013) is another factor for political instability in the country. This is due to inequalities in distribution of resources which inevitably generate conflicts that engender political instability in the political system of the country.

In order to restore political stability in Nigeria, it is pertinent to educate Nigerians to consider the country first in whatever they are doing before their ethnic or religious interests (Ona, 2013). This can be done through citizenship education to the younger generation.

This paper will therefore examine the role of citizenship education in ensuring political stability and also recommend how political stability can be achieved in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

Citizenship education is the amalgamation of two terms citizenship and education, so we need to clarify them separately before defining citizenship education. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 7th edition, defined citizen as "a person having the legal right to belong to a particular country". Therefore, citizens are those who have the legal right to belong to the country. According to Foucault (1991) cited in Ejere (2008), a citizen is a person who has the nationality of a particular country. This means that a citizen of a state is also a national of that state (Ejere, 2008). Therefore, citizenship "is the dynamic relationship between a citizen and his or her nation" (Lar, 1999). This comprises of what the citizen can do for the state and what the state can do for the citizen.

Okeke (2001) defined citizenship as "the status of individuals who live in a particular state and who possess full political and legal rights in that state." Nigeria citizenship can be acquired by birth, by registration, or by nationalization (Omolayo, 2006). Heywood (1975) cited in Olutobi (2006) described citizenship as "a relationship between the individual and the state in which the two are bound together by reciprocal rights and duties. Citizenship involves what a citizen can do for his country such as voting and paying taxes and also the benefits or entitlements that they have right to demand from the government (Shefritz, 1988). It is because of this that a citizen of a country can be distinguished from foreigners who are living in the country without been citizens of that country (Ejere, 2008).

Nchi (2000) defined citizenship as "constitutional status making one a subject of a country based on birth, descent, or naturalization." It is generally accepted that citizenship is connected with both rights and duties. These rights, duties and obligations are show in the citizen's social behaviour, political behaviour, economic behaviour and his or her personal other commitments (Omolayo, 2006).

Education is the transmission of cultural values and skills from one generation to another. The objective of education is to make life worth living by advancing the socio-economic, political well being of the citizens as well as advancement in science and technology. To Dugguh (2007) education is the learning activity which aimed at preparing individuals for a variety of roles in society as good citizen, workers and members of family groups. Therefore, education is the transmission of information, knowledge, skills, values and behaviours from a giver to a receiver with the intention of influencing learners and thereafter society in general in a desirable way (Nwaboku, 1997).

To Nyerere (1971) the aim of education from the social perspective is “to transmit from one generation to the next, the accumulated wisdom and knowledge of the society, and to prepare the young people for the future membership of the society and their active participation in its maintenance or development”. Therefore, education has a vital role to play in the life of an individual and the society in general. School which is one of the agents of socialization is the best avenue “introduced to inculcate the rightful values and norms into younger ones for the political stability in the country” (Ona, 2013). This can be achieved through citizenship education which is concerned about “enabling people to make their own decisions and to take responsibility for their lives and the communities (Citizenship Foundation, 2014).

What then is citizenship education? Citizenship education is concerned about what it takes to be a citizen of a country, the person’s responsibilities in the society, limitations and the fundamental rights that he or she is supposed to enjoy as is contained in the constitution (Lar, 1999). Citizenship emphasizes how to prepare the individuals for social responsibility which will enable them to live a useful life in the society that they may find themselves in the future (Enem, 2007). Citizenship education can be viewed as the type of education that is concerned about character molding and development of good behaviour by the citizens for the positive contribution in the development of their society.

To Okam (1998), “Citizenship education has to do with leading the individual to find excitement and motivation in the process of social living.” Citizenship education is about the production of citizens who are aware of the human and political issues at stake in their country or nation and “also aware of the inconsistencies in human ideals and their actual behaviour” (Okam, 1998). On the whole, citizenship education is a veritable tool through which political socialization is acquired by the citizens. Political socialization means the way in which political values are acquired and how the political culture is transmitted from one generation to another.

Political Stability

The studying of how our predecessors succeeded and why they failed, and finding out the reason why, is what we call the study of politics or political science. Politics as a general concept can be referred to as the practice of the art or science of directing, administrating states or other political components (McClean, 1996). He further stated that politics is all about “civil government, the state and public affairs, human conflict and its resolution and the sources and exercise of power”. According to Anifowose (2005), politics is about “making and executing governmental decisions or policies”. Politics can also be defined as authoritative allocation of values and a process of

conflict resolution in society. Politics is concerned about how agitated issues are settled through negotiation, argument, discussion, application of force and persuasion (Anifowose, 2005).

Political stability is therefore the absence of political instability in a political system. Political stability is that political activity that is directed towards maintaining the stability of status quo (Ponton & Gill, 1988). They further stated that the “aim of political system is to maintain equilibrium”.

The premise of political stability is that which sustains government and ensures stability and it is “voluntary support or consent of citizens rather than reliance on coercion” (Osaghae, 1997). Political stability means that government is a product of the will of the people and derives its power from the people’s consent. This means that, the people willingly support the government without any coercive means. Therefore, the government has to reciprocate the gesture, by carrying out policies that are in line with the aspirations of the citizens. When this happens, then, there will be political stability.

Good Governance

The concept of governance is as old as human civilization. Recently, the terms “governance” and “good” governance are frequently used in development literature. Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 7th Edition, defined governance as “the activity of governing a country or controlling a company or an organization, the way in which a country is governed or a company or institution is controlled”. Coleman (1965) cited in Arisi and Ukadike (2013) described governance as the process of “decision making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented)”. Governance can be seen as how state, societal institutions relate to each other, and also how rules are made in a society and accepted as legitimate by individuals and groups within the society. Governance can be used in several contexts such as corporate governance, international governance. Governance refers to the organization of life in a group or groups of societies. It entails values, institutions, norms and rules including procedures for the purpose of stability and prosperity (Noun, 2014). Governance is seen as the “process of steering state and society towards the realization of collective goals” (Adejumobi, 2004). Governance can be viewed as a process of social interaction between the rulers and the ruled in a political community.

The United Nations Development Programme (NNDP) cited in Adejumobi (2004) viewed governance as “the totality of the exercise of authority in the management of a country’s affairs, comprising of the complex mechanism, processes, and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights and mediate their differences.” Governance can be described as the process of public accountability, transparency in government procedure, rule of law, and public-sector management (Adejumobi, 2004). The UN Human Development Report (2004) stated that governance has two faces, first, the leadership that has responsibilities derived from the principles of effective government organizations; second, the governed, who are responsible for making relevant inputs to the socio-economic and political affairs of their society. Therefore, governance is all about relationship between rulers and the ruled, the state and society, the governors and the governed (Arisi & Ukadike, 2013).

The concept of good governance is derived from that of governance. It is believed that in any given society, there are sets of rules and norms. When the overseer of that society administers it according to the societal set rules and norms, the constituents will describe such an administration as that enjoying the tenets of good governance (Noun, 2014). Good governance served as a barometer for measuring the performance of a governor whether he or she meets the standard or target set for him or her by the people (Noun, 2014). The essential ingredients of good governance are: Political rights, civil rights, political participation and all enabling rights, as members of a free society subject to the strict observance of the rule of law, constitutions and constitutionalism (Noun, 2014).

According to Mohideen (1997), “governance becomes “good” when it is operated in accordance with legal and ethical principles as conceived by society”. Best (2006) defined good governance as the running of the affairs of government in positive and progressive manners beneficial to the ruled, and which delivers public goods. He further stated that good governance is characterized by democratization, maintenance of law and order, accountability and transparency, responsiveness on the part of the government, due process, the rule of law competence separation and devolution of powers, respect for human rights. Other component of good governance are a free press and a free civil society environment, competition for power and the existence of a formidable opposition and respect for human rights (Ogundiya, 2010). Good governance is the systematic application of government resources to enhance the living standard of a given society (Ezife, 2002). The provision of social amenities like drinking water, roads, power supply, communication facilities, health and education as well as security of lives by government (Ezife, 2002).

The Role of Citizenship Education in Ensuring Political Stability in Nigeria

Citizenship education emerged about a century ago as a kind of panacea to solving problems confronting human kind. It is a fact that Nigeria is facing conflicts of various dimensions which is affecting the political stability of the country. Such conflicts are inter- and intra ethnic rivalry and struggle for political power, inter and intra-religious crises as well as structural violence (Anifowose, 1993). The level of insecurity is high in Nigeria today, due to the activities of Boko Haram sect in the North East of Nigeria. The Niger Delta militants in the South-South region where oil is produced, the crises of legitimacy of government at the Federal, State, and local government, and also the widespread of poverty and unemployment, despite the resources of the country both human and natural. This creates distrust among the politicians and the citizens (Ona, 2013).

Therefore, in order to address the political instability facing Nigeria political system, citizenship education will serve as the best option. Citizenship education as a course in the curriculum of tertiary institutions has the ability and capacity to impart on the citizens especially the younger ones, their rights, duties, the rights of others, and their duties, and the general need of political stability. Educating the younger ones through citizenship education is the option in achieving political stability in Nigeria. Through effective teaching and learning of citizenship education, the younger ones will be exposed to essential political norms and values of our society. This includes the need to avoid political apathy. The knowledge acquired through this exposition assists them

to develop desirable political orientation, patriotic attitudes and national consciousness, which are essential ingredients for political stability (Enem, 2007).

Nigeria political system is becoming very complex; therefore, it requires adequate awareness for effective participation. Citizenship education is in better position to create that awareness which will aid the citizens to achieve the desired political culture. Citizenship education also exposes individuals to develop democratic values such as obedience to law, freedom of opinion, liberty, justice, tolerance and respect for the constituted authority (Enem 2007).

Citizenship education exposes citizens to understand themselves, their fellow human beings and their political environment. This education also helps them to interact and have more information about political processes which enable them to participate effectively as members of a group in wider range of political activities of their country. It also emphasizes self-reliance and understanding of problems and prospect of the nation's economy (Enem, 2007).

The Nigeria youths are leaders of tomorrow. Therefore, it is imperative that they should be given the necessary expertise and experience needed to claim their rights and understand the duties and responsibilities, and challenges that await them (Ona, 2013). The political violence and instability in Nigerian state is the handiwork of the youths who are used by the politicians for their selfish interests and are dopped after they have achieved their aims. Even the inter-and intra-ethnic and religious conflicts are caused by these unemployed youths. So, when the content of citizenship education is well understood by the youths as a way of life, only then will realise that political stability is more valuable than violence (Ona, 2013). Citizenship education as a course can be considered as veritable instrument capable of producing personalities that can contribute positively to the development of the society and maintenance of political stability in Nigeria.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is now clear that citizenship education plays a vital role in the inculcation of rights attitudes, values, such as co-operation, open-mindedness, honesty, respect, obedience, national consciousness and loyalty on the youths. Youths that are well informed, educated, and have acquired the basic social skills in the society, cannot be a threat to political stability, instead asset to political instability solution in Nigeria.

The country cannot be saved if there is political instability, economic crises, and ethno-religious conflicts in the country. Therefore, in order to have socio-economic and political stability, citizenship education should be encouraged so that youths and other members of the society would acquire social skills, values and attitudes that will promote political stability.

Recommendations

Based on the foregoing discussion, the paper recommended that citizenship education should be encouraged to bring about an improved quality of governance in the country. Citizenship education act as catalyst for political stability and it also preaches good governance. It is therefore recommended that citizenship education should be taught in all tertiary institutions, both public and private ones. In fact, it should be made mandatory.

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