

ACHIEVING GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA THROUGH SOCIAL STUDIES VOTER EDUCATION

¹AYODELE J. B. and ²YEMI-FADIPE B.O

¹Department of Educational Management,

²Department of Social Science Education

^{1&2}Faculty of Education, Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti.

Abstract

This study discussed the implication of voter education for good governance in Nigeria. The paper discussed the concept of voter education as a kind of education concerned with the process of educating the youths on their rights and values as well as their duties of the government to the society in relation to the election processes. Voter education enables the youths to realize that democracy is an indispensable pre-condition for rapid national development and equally educate them about their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Voter education focuses on the determinants of the attitude of citizens to civic and political issues as their knowledge about the political system. Civic engagements or practices of the citizens are determined by their political attitudes, practices are also interrelated and independent. Quality voter education has the capacity to help the youths to identify the danger of political apathy, political silence and political violence which might translate to and deemphasize those factors that only tends to disintegrate, rather than articulate our collective interest in the country. Voter education no doubt is a veritable tool for good governance since it enables citizens to possess appropriate skills, knowledge, values and thus manifest the appropriate behaviours which promote sustainable democracy. Through voter education, youths will acquire adequate information, skills, experience and knowledge about the political process and thus enable them to exhibit the right attitude as citizens for the development of the country, through ensuring good governance.

Keywords: education, Governance, youths, behaviour, attitude

Introduction

In Nigeria democratic society, for a good and sustainable governance, the citizens have inalienable rights, duties and responsibilities to participate in the electoral process. It is thus essential for the youths as electorates to actively participate in electoral process. Voting is effective for them to exercise in order to elect the credible leaders of their choice. Voter education is vital programme for the youths during the political process as it provides information on who is eligible to

vote, where and how to register, how individuals can check the voter lists to ensure they have been duly included, what type of elections are being held, where, when and how to vote, who the candidates are and how to file complaints. According to Ajayi (2011), in a democratic and successful election, youths must know their rights and responsibilities, knowledgeable and be well informed on how to cast ballots that are legally valid in an election and this appears to be possible through voter education. In the assertion of

Oyatomi (2009) youths require adequate voter education to know the values and importance of democracy and these values can easily be transformed to their daily activities. It appears that most of the youths have negative attitude towards voting, perhaps due to inadequate voter education. Falade (2011) suggested that in a political system, the youths can be involved in the political process and decision making by joining political parties of their choice, voting during elections, participating in election campaigns, community affairs and other political activities.

In the view of Oyetade (2013), attitude is how we think, feel and act towards our fellow human beings and how they think, feel and acts towards us. Attitude to civic and political issues refers to the expression of individual feelings, expression or predisposition towards civic and political matters. Ojo (2013) advanced lack of development of democratic attitude (values) as one major obstacle that has marred democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Both the elites and youths have surprisingly shown weak commitment to basic symbols and values of democracy. Hence, there is serious manifestation of greed, inordinate ambition to get power, thuggery, dishonesty, personalization of political/ public offices, insincerity, disrespect for others and intolerance in the polity.

All these undemocratic behaviours manifest in the forms of electoral rigging and kidnapping/killing of political opponents. There have been incidences of

sponsoring of publications and damaging articles in the social media, couple with tearing, removal or defacing of posters belonging to political opponents / parties. Youths have been accused of enlisting into various cult groups to be used as party kingpin or political thugs. The role of Social Studies education in voter education is very crucial as it makes youths to grow in wisdom and understanding, trains them to live together with others and improve their basic attitudes to society. Ogundare (2007) opined that the introduction of Social Studies in Nigeria was due to the need for a more effective way of educating citizens. Relatively, voter education as needed by the youths during political process in an educational programme that provides the citizenry with knowledge, skills and values for the development of the society. Voter education gives individual the self- confidence needed to engage in discussions on issues of governance and affords people the information required to make informed judgment.

The Concept of Voter Education

Voter education is a concept which varies in nature and purpose historically and from country to country and it has been described variously by different authors. It can be seen to be the kind of activity concerned with the process of educating the people on their rights and values as well as the duties of the government to the society in relation to the election processes. Hariman (2006) postulated that voter education is an effort

to create among citizens a new set of culturally defining "habits of the heart" which will enhance citizenship, foster a sense of connectedness to a community stretching beyond the schools and ultimately support the practices, basic values and institutions necessary for a democratic process. It is also seen as an important component of civic education that mobilises citizens to participate in the public life of a democracy and to use their rights to discharge their franchise. Voter education is not complete until citizens possess a set of appropriate civic dispositions which are of those habits of the heart and mind that are conducive to the healthy functioning of the democratic system.

Voter education, as described by Ajayi (2011), is a process of dissemination of information, materials and programmes designed to inform voters about the specifics and mechanics of voting process for a particular election. It involves providing information on who is eligible to vote, where and how to register, how people can check the voters lists to ensure they have been duly included, what type(s) of election is/ are being held, how to vote, who the candidates are and how the candidates are and how to file complaints. Alonge (2007) too saw the concept as ideals and knowledge needed for the provision of information and learning experience to equip and empower citizens to participate in the democratic process. He went further to say that it provides the citizens with opportunity of understanding their political culture, political ideology

and thoughts, their fundamental human rights and the basic elements and structures of the constitution of their country. From the foregoing, it could be deduced that for an election to be successful and democratic, voters must understand their rights and responsibilities, and must be sufficiently knowledgeable and well informed to cast ballots that are legally valid and to participate meaningfully in the voting process.

The Role of Social Studies Education in Voter Education

Social Studies is a discipline that makes the youths and other recipients to understand their relationship with the society and the world as a whole. As rightly observed by Ololobou (2010), Social Studies makes youths to grow in wisdom and understanding, trains them to live together with others and improve their basic attitudes to society. Social Studies as a discipline has the capacity to sensitize the youths as citizens on the need to be patriotic, cooperative, tolerant hardworking, fair, have integrity and justice at work. Social Studies Education plays an important role in inculcating the spirit of national consciousness and patriotism in the youths through the teaching of citizenship concepts as an aspect of Social Studies curriculum. Ogundare (2007) opined that the introduction of Social Studies in Nigeria was due to the need for a more effective way of educating citizens. Relatively, voter education as needed by the youths during political process is an educational

programme that provides the citizenry with knowledge, skills and values for the development of the society. Ololobou (2010) asserted that Social Studies gives youths opportunity to have knowledge and understating of the society in which they live and promotes living together of the youths as one people.

In the contribution of Akinlaye, Mansaray and Ajiboye (2006), Social Studies has a special task of freeing the citizens from the shackles of ignorance in the areas of man's relations with his varied economic environments be it in agriculture, commerce, business, and industry and also in all cultural situations of disease, grinding poverty, and perplexing rapid population. Hassan (2011), reported that Social Studies contributes immensely to the development of favourable attitudes of social, physical, cultural and economic development in the youths to enable them participate in the development of the community as citizens. This is very relevant to voter education required by the youths.

Akinyele (2007) stated that Social Studies give the youths the means of interpreting and assessing developments in the world. This makes them see where things happen and what they mean to be good of human beings. In view of this, voter education is to make the society impinge on creating some positive impact on the behaviour of the citizen social and political affairs. It also promotes democracy and civic values. Ogundare (2007) emphasised that Social Studies was developed as a balanced curriculum that

would help the individual to develop total adjustment within the society. The contributing efforts of Social Studies to Nigerian youths is that it helps them to know and feel concerned about the problems of society to gain understanding about things like ethnicity, attitudes to war, poverty and injustice. In the opinion of Osalusi (2011), Social Studies equips the learners with basic knowledge, problem-solving and thinking skills that could lead to self-development. Okam and Chukwu (2010) had earlier contended that Social Studies creates awareness in the youths about the problems of the Nigerian society and their origin as well as how they are being solved while Falade (2011) noted that, in considering Nigerian political system, promotion of voter education promotes the liberation of the Nigerian nation from ignorance and other liabilities. The youths are given information, skills, values and ideas about voting through voter education which in turn provide them with opportunity that will make them shun attitudes such as engaging in assassination, election rigging, false declaration of results, protest, indolence and ethnic pluralism. Akinyele (2005) viewed Social Studies as a field of study that deals with the integration of knowledge, experiences and effective use of resources for the purpose of citizenship education. Ogundare (2007) noted also that Social Studies is concerned with fostering knowledge, skills, attitudes and values in the learners.

The aim of teaching Social Studies is said to prepare young learners for

effective participation in the society. Falade (2010) corroborated this by saying that it is to equip the youths to be informed on societal issues and problems as well as to foster in them with life skills required for problem solving and effective citizenship. Kehinde-Awoyele (2012) added that this is the reason why Social Studies is described as a subject that aims at training the learners to acquire the traits that will enable them to participate effectively in a democratic setting.

Importance of Voter Education in Achieving Good Governance

The issue of the contribution of voter education is not only essential in developing democracies but in any kind of government that emerged to humanity from poverty resulting from bad governance and its attendant social-economic, cultural, political and role of voter education in governance becomes technological problems. Therefore the role of voter education in governance becomes inestimable, if the citizens are to enjoy dividends of democracy as well as participate in governmental activities with the aim of national development. In opinion of Kehinde-Awoyele (2012) the kind of orientation which exist in a population has a significant influence on the ways in which the political system works. The demand made upon the system and, the responses to laws as the conduct of individuals in their political roles are all shaped by the common orientation patterns. This is made possible only through the machinery of educating,

sensitizing, mobilizing and equipping the voters through voter education. Falade (2012) argued that political stability and development of any political system is a function of the awareness and positive involvement of the citizens in civic and political matter. Corroborating this, Akinboye (2013) posited that democracy demands from the common man a certain level of ability and character, rational conduct and active participation in government.

Furthermore, Hassan (2011) opined that for Nigeria to achieve good and sustainable governance, citizens must possess skills, values, and manifest the appropriate behaviours which promote good governance. Voter education helps citizens to make informed judgment about the nature of democratic system, politics, government and such knowledge could promote the understanding of the nature and importance of democratic society and the art of good governance. A democratic society prevents the abuse or excessive concentration of power by government. Good governance recognises that positive socio-political change is a function of citizens' active participation in electoral processes. Popular participation empowerment and consultation are important because they help to provide legitimacy for governmental action. As a political socialisation process, voter education provides necessary knowledge and skills required for voter effective engagement in this direction. Voter education gives individuals the self-confidence needed to engage in

discussions on issues of governance and affords people the information required to make informed judgment.

To achieve good and sustainable governance, the citizens need to be equipped with knowledge of the ideals, values and principles of democratic system which are embedded in voter education. Those ideals, values and principles are criteria which citizens can use to judge the means and ends of government. Voter education in a constitutional democracy means that each citizen is a full and equal member of a community and is endowed with fundamental rights and entrusted with responsibilities. In line with these assertions, William (2011) argued that, it is expected that after acquiring such knowledge, citizens should understand that through their involvement in political life and civic society, they can help in creating sustainable good governance. The intellectual and participation skills are essential for informed, effective and responsible citizenship. After acquiring these skills, citizens will be able to identify, describe, explain, analyse and evaluate decisions as well as defend position on public issues.

In the opinion of Kehinde-Awoyele (2012), good citizens are law abiding, contribute to the development of the state, listen to people's view/ opinion when in power and made necessary amendment where needed. They also see that the state is always at peace. Furthermore, citizens in the democratic society require disposition to electoral system necessary for good governance. Voter education is a

necessary condition for political and economic reform because it sensitises the citizens on the need to be patriotic, cooperative, tolerant and abide by the constitutional provisions. Abdugafar (2011) stated that voter education is a critical tool for administration of justice, equity, fair play, transparency and accountability that are of great value in corporate governance. In line with the above, Lauren (2008), a Mozambiquan civil society activist, revealed that lack of voter education is the essence of poor participation of Mozambiquan in the electoral processes. She stressed further that there is need for continuous voter education that would include all the groups of the civic society that should be sensitized and mobilized at every turn. The above assertion further stressed the viable position occupied by voter education in good governance in the world. It also facilitates active involvement of the citizens in political processes by making adequate information accessible to the people.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Voter education is an education in self-governance that is concerned with promoting the understanding of the ideals of democracy and a reasoned commitment of the values and principles of democracy. Voter education emphasises that political stability and development of any political system is a function of the awareness and positive involvement of the citizens in civic and political matter. For Nigeria to achieve good and sustainable governance,

citizens must possess skills, values, and manifest the appropriate behaviours which promote good governance. Voter education helps citizens to make informed judgment about the nature of democratic system, politics, government and such knowledge could promote the understanding of the nature and importance of democratic society and the art of good governance. The youths are expected to possess a good grasp of democratic values which aid, guide and direct their conducts in the discharge of their civic responsibilities because democracy is nurtured and sustained only when democratic values are rooted in the minds and actions of citizens.

Government should organize voter educational programme in the media, such as radio, television and newspaper to educate youths who have not got the opportunity to be involved in the voter education programme on voting exercise. These youths will be knowledgeable on their rights, duties and responsibilities as citizens to vote during electoral process to contribute to the development of their country.

The National Orientation Agency (NOA) should organise seminars to enlighten youths on voter education and also on the right attitudes to voting so as to eradicate all sort of negative attitudes such as thuggery, assassination, kidnapping, electoral violence, electoral apathy, religious marginalisation, exploitation, rebellion and protest during electoral processes. These will allow youths to develop positive attitudes before, during

and after electoral processes so as to choose credible leaders of their choice.

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