

Toward a Functional Citizenship Education Curriculum in Nigerian Colleges of Education for Sustainable Development in the 21st Century

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Abstract

This study was carried out to identify basic components of civic awareness, civic knowledge and civic dispositions needed by youths in two Colleges of Education in Anambra State of Nigeria as a basis for a functional Citizenship Education curriculum. Three hundred students were randomly selected from the two Colleges of Education in Anambra State. A 50-item questionnaire survey method was utilized based on five research questions. Findings indicated that in the perceptions of the students, it is ideal to incorporate several civic components, skills and dispositions into the citizenship education curriculum. Recommendations were made for revamping of the citizenship education curriculum in Colleges of Education in line with the identified civic components, skills and dispositions so as to ensure the establishment of education for sustainable development in the country.

Keywords: Citizenship education, functional curriculum, sustainable development, teachers.

Introduction

Since the declaration of the years 2005-2014 as the United Nations (UN) decade of Education for Sustainable development (ESD), UNESCO in particular has organized a number of global education conferences aimed at giving people the opportunity to discuss why and how to integrate the values inherent in sustainable development into teaching and learning processes. The aim is to use education to encourage changes in behavior that will create a more sustainable future in terms of “environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society for present and future generations” (UNESCO 2009,p.1). The need to redirect educational efforts towards the achievement of sustainable development is a global one but it appears to be more pronounced in developing countries such as Nigeria.

In the past three decades, Nigerians have witnessed dramatic oppressions from military dictators and have seen one authoritarian regime after another toppled in the mist of different forms of political violence. Even with the enthronement of democracy in Nigeria in 1999, ethnic conflicts, massive corruption, kidnapping, religious violence, vandalisation of public facilities, call for confederacy and secession, suspicion and distrust among the various ethnic groups are among the problems which Nigeria currently faces (Ajiboye, 2009; Alutu & Ifedili, 2012; Mogbor & Mogbor, 2002). Further, the spate of corruption in Nigeria is alarming and pervades every aspect of National life from the technocrats to the politicians. Consequently, the loss of value, the imbibing of false values, the lack of self-spiritedness, patriotism etc. have become the lots of Nigerians. These social ills have pervaded all sectors, all aspects of the society that they constitute the essential problems with which in reality Nigerians have to contend. These ills are likely to have been caused by what Chinsman (1996, p,iii) summed up as:

The seemingly perpetual subservience of the Nigerian population, their incapability to empower themselves and put themselves on the driver's seat of the vehicle for development, their powerlessness to engineer political, social and economic change and transformation, have collectively created the environment that led to this present poor conditions.

Authors such as Akpan (2001) and Edozie (2009) agreed that the absence of an informed and participatory citizenship is responsible for these problems. This implies that a good number of Nigerians are yet to understand and demonstrate the type of citizenship qualities necessary for the human and material development of the country. Hence, Ali (2008) and Oluniyi (2011) opined that the best way to change the Nigerian situation, strengthen her democracy and meet the challenges of this millennium is to guarantee a universal, qualitative and excellent citizenship education for every child in this country. This is line with Walson-Jack (1999) who noted that a world class citizenship education is essential to combating the fear, the ignorance, the prejudice, and apathy that undermine freedom today in form of ethnic, religious, racial and economic depressions.

Citizenship education in its ideal form seeks to engage citizens in their communities and schools by teaching them the skills necessary to effectively participate in civil society. Citizenship or civics education is construed broadly to encompass the preparation of young people for their roles and responsibilities as citizens and, in particular, the role of education (through schooling, teaching and learning) in that preparatory process (Kerr, 2004). Effective citizenship education that teaches people how to participate and effect positive change within their environment is critical to the development of a lasting commitment to civic participation (Magstadt, 2009, Mhlauli, 2012a; Mathews & Dilworth, 2008). According to Oluniyi (2011), the aim of citizenship classes is to develop young people into responsible citizens, who understand their rights and responsibilities and can play an active part in society. The subject should educate children in how to be politically literate using real issues. This is because being taught to respect the law without learning how bad laws can be changed and better ones promoted, tend to create apathetic subjects rather than active citizens. Citizenship education involves shaping the development of character with a view to the improvement of man and ultimately the society. In this regard, citizenship education shares close affinities with Education for Sustainable Development which according to UNESCO (2009, p.1)

enables people to develop the knowledge, values and skills to participate in decisions about the ways we do things, individually and collectively, both locally and globally, that will improve the quality of life now without damaging the planet for the future.

To this end, a functional citizenship education must convey fresh knowledge, develop existing aptitude and impart useful skills so as to help learners develop the type of quality life that involves respect not only for human beings but also for resources, fauna and flora existing on the planet. The Nigerian government in the national policy on education recognized the place of citizenship education and consequently included it in the schools' curricula (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004). Further, the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (2007) developed a civics curriculum for the inculcation of citizenship education in Nigerian primary and junior secondary schools. The themes covered in the curriculum are displayed in Tables 1 and 2 in the appendix.

The curriculum package contains relevant themes that would to a large extent, make schools places where students would be taught basic values and ideals that would presumably make them responsible citizens. The curriculum has also given pupils what the Clark Report in United States of America (1998, p. 10) described as an "entitlement in schools that will empower them to participate in society effectively as active, informed, critical and responsible citizens". Effective implementation of this laudable curriculum requires knowledgeable and competent teachers.

In Nigeria, Colleges of Education are charged with the responsibility of producing qualified and competent teachers for primary and junior secondary school levels in Nigeria. Presently in these institutions, citizenship education is taught as a general course. Oluniyi (2011) noted that the content of the course is limited to some basic concepts in political science such as Organs of Government, concepts such as Democracy, Monarchy, Socialism, Political Party and Party System: Power and Authority. One could certainly see some disconnect between the civics education curriculum of primary and junior secondary schools and the curriculum used to prepare the teachers that would deliver the curriculum. It is certainly true that the knowledge and skills of citizenship education can be organized into a political science course.

However the principles, values and institutions of citizenship demanded by the 2007 Civics Education curriculum and global trends are so diverse and essential that they call for “a more realistic teaching about the nature of citizenship, life and a better understanding of the complete elements of the art of the possible” (The American Political Science Association, 1997, p.1). The extent to which such curriculum would equip teachers with the knowledge, skills and useful pedagogical methods that assist in achieving citizenship education goals is in doubt.

The citizenship education curriculum for teacher education institutions needs to be reviewed to make it more adequate to meet the needs of citizenship education for pupils. Teachers must be prepared to meet the challenges of and become involved in delivering a functional and innovative curriculum (Oloruntegbe, Duyilemi, Oluwatelure, Adare, & Omoniyi (2010). There is need for curriculum experts in the country to devise new contents for teaching and learning which would be more relevant to the transmission of knowledge and structure necessary for developing in youngsters the traits of good citizenship in the active sense. It has become necessary to plan towards a functional citizenship education curriculum in Colleges of Education in Nigeria. Such curriculum will consider among other things the actual needs of the students for whom the curriculum is meant. The aim of this paper was therefore to identify the areas of needs of students that would form the basis for selection of curriculum content that would ensure a functional citizenship education programme in Nigeria.

Research Questions

This study was guided by five research questions:

1. What should be the central medium for imparting citizenship values?
2. What should be the essential components of citizenship education in Colleges of Education?
3. What citizenship skills should the students in Colleges of Education acquire?
4. What civic dispositions should students in Colleges of Education that are essential to the maintenance and improvement of the Nigerian nation?
5. What other major issues should be included in citizenship education curriculum for the Colleges of Education?

Methodology

This study was carried out in Anambra State of Nigeria. The population consisted of all the year two students in the two Colleges of Education (Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe and Federal College of Education (Technical), Umunze in Anambra State of Nigeria. The choice of students was to incorporate their needs into the needs of the wider society with a view to evolving a curriculum that will be acceptable to all. Using simple random sampling; one hundred and fifty students were randomly selected from each of the two colleges of education thereby bringing the sample size to three hundred respondents.

A need assessment instrument (NAI) was adapted and modified from CIVITAS international (A consortium for civic educators) and used for the study. The instrument which contained 39 items was a five part questionnaire designed to obtain responses by requesting the respondents to indicate their preference by ticking (✓) against the preferred option. Two lecturers in curriculum studies and one in citizenship education from Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka did the content and face validation of the instrument. To test for reliability, 10 copies of the questionnaire were administered to 10 students of a State government owned higher institution using the test-retest method. After an interval of 2 weeks, the tests were administered again to the same students. The scores when correlated yielded a co-efficient of 0.93, which was acceptable for the study. Copies of the questionnaire were self administered by the researchers after offering a preliminary explanation of the subject matter. The mean responses above 3.00 were accepted and the mean scores were thereafter ranked.

Results

The data analysis and results of the study are shown in Tables 3 to 7 in the appendix. In Table 3, all the items scored above the acceptable mean score of 3.00 with education registering the highest score of 5.00. This implies that though all these media should be used to impart citizenship values, education should be the central medium.

Table 4 shows that in the respondents' opinions, the entire 15 items are essential components of a functional citizenship education curriculum. This is because all the items scored above the acceptable mean of 3.00.

Table 5 reveals that apart from military skills, all the skills (intellectual, participatory, technical, communication and evaluation) were rated above the acceptable mean score of 3.0 indicating that they are the skills students should acquire in citizenship education.

Table 6 indicates that all the items scored above the acceptable mean score. This indicates that although item 1 (Becoming an independent member of the society) ranked 1st with a mean score of 5.00, all the other items are highly desirable civic dispositions that are indispensable to the improvement of the Nigerian nation.

In Table 7, all the items scored above the acceptable mean of 3.0 indicating that these items such as lifelong education, cultural literacy, poverty, health, leisure and stress management, among others, should be covered in functional citizenship education curriculum.

Discussion and Implications of Findings

The respondents believed that the most important medium for internalizing citizenship values is through education. This is in line with the views held over the years that education is an instrument for sustaining effective citizenship (Ali, 2008; Davies, 2006; Mhlauli, 2012a; UNESCO, 2005). It is however regrettable that this element is often overlooked in campaigns to reduce crime and corruption. Other institutions such as the mass media, family, religious institutions and political parties exert important influences but schools bear a special and historic responsibility for the development of civic competency and responsibility. This implies that education should achieve this through formal and informal education beginning in the early years and continuing through the entire educational process. It is in this regard that UNESCO (2008:1) posits that “education is a right, a foundation and prerequisite for sustainable development and that learning happens throughout life”.

The respondents opined that education should provide a basic and realistic understanding of democracies, civics life, Knowledge and acceptance of different cultures and religion, ideals of democratic living, politics and government. It should familiarize students with the constitution of Nigeria and the laws of the States in which they live. Education should enable citizens to understand the workings of their own and other political systems as well as the relationship of the politics and government of their own country to world affairs. This agrees with a similar finding in Botswana by Mhlauli (2012b). It also supports the claim that “good civics education should promote an understanding of how and why one’s security, quality of life and economic position are connected to that of neighbouring countries” (Gana 1999:2).

The study also revealed that the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a country should be emphasized by citizenship education. However, Walson-Jack (1999) warned that instruction about rights should make it clear that few rights can be absolute. This is necessary because rights may reinforce or conflict with one another or other values and interests and therefore requires reasonable limitations. Another essential component of civic education is the responsibilities of citizens in a constitutional democracy. This suggests that for Nigerian democracy to flourish, citizens not only must know of their rights, they must also exercise their responsibilities and fulfill those personal and civic responsibilities necessary for a free, just and dynamic society. Oluniyi (2011) also noted that to sustain and consolidate the democracy, teachers should teach citizens to internalize the purpose of democracy. Values such as liberty, service, justice, religious equality, and tolerance among others must be inculcated. This implies that in addition to the above, extra or co-curricular activities that a school provides must portray elements of citizenship education. Research has consistently demonstrated the positive effects of co-curricular activities on students’ motivation; self-confidence and leadership capabilities (Edozie, 2009; Mhlauli, 2012b, Ibiwumni, 2012). Existing opportunities for co-curricular activities need to be encouraged. For example community service helps students to generate a sense of individual responsibility for public good, dignity in labour and thus be modeled into orderly, temperate, moderate and self-controlled citizens.

Analysis of data for research question 3 revealed the need for the citizenship education curriculum to focus on a variety of skills. Such skills involve intellectual, technical, communication, evaluation and even military skills. These skills are similar to the ones which teachers in Europe (Germany, Italy, England, Greece, Belgium) identified as essential for effective citizenship (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2012). This implies that students need to acquire those skills that will help them in identifying and describing, explaining and analysing, and evaluating, taking and defending positions on public issues.

In other words, a good citizenship education curriculum should enable one to identify or give the meaning or significance of human and non-human things on the planet such as ideas or concepts including patriotism, majority and minority rights, civil society, and constitutionalism. Communication skills are also a basic component of citizenship skills to be emphasized in citizenship education. The ability to identify emotional language and symbols is of particular importance for citizens. They need to be able to discern the true purposes for which emotive language and symbols are being employed. Another intellectual skill which good citizen education fosters is that of describing. The ability to describe functions and processes such as people in leadership positions or what a pupil hopes to be in future is indicative of understanding. Discerning and describing trends, such as participation in civic life, immigration, or employment helps the citizen fit current events into a longer-term pattern.

Another finding of the study is that citizenship education should enable students acquire certain civic dispositions. In this regard, learning experiences for citizenship education in Colleges of Education in Anambra State should expose students to those traits of private character such as becoming an independent member of the society, assuming the personal, political and economic responsibilities of a citizen, respecting individual worth and human dignity, participating in civic affairs in a thoughtful and effective manner, promoting the healthy functioning of constitutional democracy and having respect for natural resources. While sharing this view Soyinka (1999) affirmed that citizenship education should engender understanding among pupils that national development requires the responsible contributions of each individual irrespective of rank and status in the society. In essence, traits of private character such as moral responsibility, self-discipline, and respect for the worth and human dignity of every individual as well as respect for fauna and flora on the planet are not only imperative in citizenship education but are also some of the values inherent in ESD.

Finally, other issues to be included in the citizenship education curriculum include poverty, the legacies of our founding fathers, military intervention in Nigerian politics, peace and security, environment protection, religious fanaticism, ethnicity, youth violence & corruption, challenges of globalization, defense of democracy, gender inequality, and stress and coping strategies. This finding agrees with Oluniyi (2011) who found that contemporary issues in national development should be included in higher education citizenship curricula. Negative traits such as religious violence, armed robbery, ritual killings, electoral malpractices, official corruption must be condemned and isolated from private and national life. ICT should also be included.

This resonates with Futurelab (2012) that argued for the potential of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to successfully reinvigorate the standing of citizenship education in schools. In part these assumptions derive from the part that new media now play in political, democratic and civic practices in contemporary society. ICTs are also seen as offering ready solutions to the pedagogic and institutional shortcomings which currently restrict the teaching of citizenship in schools. A vital inference from this finding is that if citizens are to influence the course of national development, they need to acquire a repertoire of knowledge in emerging citizenship issues that present challenges to sustainable development in Nigeria.

Conclusion

This study has shown that in line with global citizenship, students in Colleges of education in Anambra State of Nigeria have identified the need to include a range of citizenship elements, skills, dispositions and issues to citizenship education. This would call for a revamping of the existing curriculum to include these components where they do not exist. One is optimistic that if the issues raised in this study can be piously pursued in schools, then citizenship education would be ideally suited to ensure that students acquire the skills and knowledge as well as develop the attitudes required of effective citizens. It is therefore an onerous task for both curriculum developers and general studies units of the colleges of education to design learning content experiences that will help incorporate these contemporary issues for a functional citizenship education. This will ensure that Nigeria becomes a sustainable society.

Recommendations

In view of these findings, it is recommended that:

1. The citizenship education curriculum of Colleges of Education should be reviewed to incorporate a range of citizenship components, knowledge, skills and dispositions identified in the study.
2. The curriculum content, methods and evaluation modes should be re-structured to accommodate ESD and other emerging global issues.
3. Teacher training and retraining should intensify efforts to enable teachers acquire the skills to use appropriate methods and techniques to foster and assess students' learning of citizenship elements.
4. Government should increase schools funding to provide an enabling human and material environment for students to acquire citizenship education.

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Appendix

Table 1: Nigerian Primary School Civics Curriculum

Grade	Topics
Primary One	Civic Education, National Symbol, Good Social Behaviour and Health Issues
Primary Two	Civic Education, The school, Community and Health Issues
Primary Three	Civic Education, National Consciousness, Duties and Responsibilities and Health Issues
Primary Four	Our Values, Citizenship, National Consciousness, Duties and Responsibilities, Government, Constituted Authority, Social Issues and Health Issues
Primary Five	Civic Education, Our Values, Citizenship, National Consciousness, Duties and Responsibilities, Government, Representative Democracy and Civil Society and Popular Participation
Primary Six	Civic Education, Values, National Consciousness and Identity, Government and Civil Society and Popular Participation

Source: Nigerian Educational and Research Development Council, 2007

Table 2: Nigerian Junior Secondary School Civics Curriculum

Grade	Topics
J.S. 1	Citizenship, National Consciousness and Identity, Representative Democracy, Nigerian Constitution, Human Rights, Rights and Obligation of Nigerian Citizens and Social Issues
J.S. 2	Our Values, Citizenship, Rights and the Rule of Law, Nigerian Constitution and Social Issues
J.S. 3	Human Rights and the Rule of Law, Nigerian Constitution, Representative Democracy, Duties and Responsibilities of Citizens, Social Issues, National Economic Life and Peace and Conflicts

Source: Nigerian Educational and Research Development Council, 2007

Table 3: The Central Medium for Imparting Citizenship Values

Medium	Mean	Rank
Education	5.00	1 st
Religion	4.00	2 nd
Information and Communications Technology	3.88	3 rd
Mass media	3.70	4 th
Sensitization campaign	3.50	5 th
Family	3.30	6 th
Political Parties	3.10	7 th
Culture	3.05	8 th

Table 4: Essential Components of Citizenship Education

Components	Mean	Rank
Supremacy and respect for life	4.91	1 st
Knowledge of civic life, politics and government	4.85	2 nd
The foundation of Nigerian political system	4.80	3 rd
The supremacy, values and principles of the nation's constitution	4.70	4 th
Government responsibilities (why governments are necessary)	4.65	5 th
Nigeria and the World	4.56	6 th
Citizens responsibilities	4.56	7 th
Knowledge and acceptance of different cultures and religion	4.51	8 th
Issue of national identity	4.44	9 th
The ideals of democratic living	4.38	10 th
Democracy: principles, types, values, obstacles	4.31	11 th
History of Democratic struggles and conflict management	4.12	12 th
History and philosophy of education in Nigeria	4.10	13 th
Secularity of the Nigerian State	3.75	14 th
Rule of Law	3.63	15 th

Table 5: Citizenship Skills that Schools should Emphasize

Skill	Mean	Rank
Intellectual skills	5.00	1st
Participatory skills	4.93	2nd
Technical skills	4.80	3rd
Communication skills	3.45	4 th
Evaluation skills	3.40	5 th
Military skills	2.51	6 th

Table 6: Civic Dispositions that are Essential to the Nations Development

Disposition	Mean	Rank
Becoming an independent member of the society	5.00	1 st
Assuming the personal, political and economic responsibilities of a citizen	4.93	2 nd
Respecting individual worth and human dignity	4.90	3 rd
Participating in civic affairs in a thoughtful and effective manner	4.85	4 th
Promoting the healthy functioning of constitutional democracy	4.80	5 th
Having respect for natural resources (animals, plants, etc)	4.75	6 th
Living and working with others, resolving conflicts	4.66	7 th
Listening, understanding and engaging in discussion	4.51	8 th
Tolerating and appreciating cultural and religious differences	4.23	9 th
Taking care of health of one and others	4.12	10 th

Table 7: Other Major Issues in Citizenship Education Curriculum

Issues	Mean	Rank
Lifelong education and poverty	5.00	1 st
Cultural heritage/literacy and the legacies of our founding fathers	4.95	2 nd
Information and communications technology for effective citizenship	4.94	3 rd
Military intervention in Nigerian Politics	4.92	4 th
Peace and security	4.90	5 th
Environmental protection	4.80	6 th
Evils of religious fanaticism, ethnicity, youth violence & corruption	4.72	7 th
Challenges of globalization	4.60	8 th
Defense of democracy	4.55	9 th
Gender inequality	3.20	10 th
Health/physical/leisure, stress and coping strategies	3.10	11 th