

Citizenship Education and Political Participation among Nigerian Students: A Case Study of The Federal Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti

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ABSTRACT: The General Studies Programme was launched into the Nigeria's tertiary institutions' curricula in order to satisfy the longing for students to be well-grounded in interdisciplinary studies so as to compete well with their counterparts in other parts of the world and particularly to enable students gain deeper insight into their environments and ensure that before they settle down in their areas of specialization, they are exposed to major areas of learning in Humanities, Natural Sciences, Use of English, Peace and Conflict Resolution, Citizenship Education, Logic and Philosophy. This study focuses on Citizenship Education as it inculcates in students an awareness of the constitutional development of Nigeria, the art of governance, fundamental human rights, Nigerian Peoples and Culture and their civic responsibilities thereby engendering participatory citizenry. The study made use of questionnaire as instrument of study which was carried out in March and April, 2017 and the targeted population of the study was 240 students who were selected using the simple random sampling technique in the four Schools in The Federal Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti. Data gathered were analysed using the simple percentage. The study showed that Citizenship Education has been able to make students better prepared to function in the political system irrespective of their fields of specialization. The findings also revealed that the impact of the Course has not been properly translated into actions by the students owing to the lack of patriotism among the citizenry.

Keywords: *Education, General Studies Programme, Citizenship Education, Political Participation.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Education is the act of methodic development or training of the mind, capabilities or character by means of instruction or study. It is a way of socializing people into the community, for sustaining customs and traditions in addition to the modification or changing of same in line with extant ideologies, ideological expansion or reformation. Education is a tool for national development. Owing to this fact, the National University Commission (NUC) launched the General Studies Programme into the University curricula and the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) also extended this to Polytechnics, Colleges of Education, and Monotechnics in order to expose the students of tertiary institutions to knowledge outside their chosen disciplines as fresh students. It is expected that this will enable them to be well grounded in interdisciplinary studies so as to compete favorably with their counterparts in the international system. To achieve this, various courses were introduced under the General Studies Programme viz Use of English, Logic & Philosophy, Peace & Conflict Resolution, Nigerian Peoples & Culture, Citizenship Education, Entrepreneurship Studies, Use of Library etc.

This paper focuses attention on Citizenship Education as it affords students the opportunity to be exposed to a course of liberal education by which they can grow and broaden their knowledge of their social, cultural, political and natural environments. The study was carried out in The Federal Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti between April and June, 2017 and the population of the study was National Diploma II, Higher National Diploma I and II students of the Four Schools (Engineering, Business Studies, Science & Computer Studies and Environmental Studies) because they have undergone various courses in the General Studies Department. Thus, the research questionnaires were administered to the targeted students. The study looks at the impact/relevance of the study of Citizenship Education to political participation among the students. Conceptual clarifications of keywords in the study are presented and the aims of introducing the General Studies Programme in Polytechnics are discussed. Results of the findings are equally discussed and recommendations based on the findings were made.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Epistemological Theory

Epistemology refers to the nature of knowledge and how knowledge is to be gathered and used in the social world. Jürgen Habermas has delved most specifically into the epistemological commitments of critical theory in his continuing development of this line of thought instituted by Frankfurt School Theorists. Habermas was interested in showing the link between knowledge and politics by laying out a politics of epistemology.

Habermas most direct contribution to this epistemological position is his distinction among so-called knowledge cognitive interest. This theory is rooted in the desire to impact knowledge on people¹.

Epistemology theory sees knowledge as a process of self-reflection through which historical constraints and exigencies can be revealed. As Mumby (2000) states, “the interest reflects human proclivity for self-reflection leading to autonomy and empowerment”². Knowledge is seen as indispensable for empowerment and emancipation of the people.

In modern society, the vital roles of the government cannot be over-emphasised. The government becomes the sole allocator of the scarce resources in the state; hence, political education and knowledge become crucial for everybody in the society. The Polytechnic is viewed as the institution where political knowledge needed by the students for their active involvement and participation in politics is being disseminated. The lecturers as repository of knowledge and agents of intellectual dissemination and students are audience and receivers of the knowledge.

The idea behind citizenship education is to ensure that students irrespective of their discipline acquire political knowledge to enable them to function appropriately in the new emergent society.

III. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Education

Education can be defined as the process or art of imparting knowledge, skill or judgment in an individual or corporate body. It is a way by which facts, skills and ideas that have been learned either formally or informally are being imparted or transferred to an individual/group. It is severally concerned and inculcated within the limits and possibilities of the immediate learning environment to promote capacity building, economic reconstruction and ethical re-orientation of the citizens. Esu and Junaid (2016) conceive of education as the instrument used in passing on to new generations the extant knowledge of their physical, socio-political environment, a means of orientating individuals to the organization of society, a means of passing skills for performing their daily jobs and enjoying their leisure, cum instilling sound moral in them for their own good and that of the society.³ That is to say, education is a process by which the society helps the younger generation to know the heritage of their past, participate creatively and actively in the society of the present as well as contribute to the future.

Tertiary Institution

The tertiary level of education is our focus in this study and this is the level where professionalism is attained. Tertiary institutions by simple definition refer to the third level of learning after primary and secondary schools. Generally, Nigeria’s tertiary education system is made up of three categories of institutions namely the Colleges of Education, Polytechnics/ Colleges of Technology and Universities. On a broader level, the Nigerian National Policy on Education defines tertiary education as “Education given after secondary education in Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education, Monotechnics including institutions offering corresponding courses”⁴. Individuals are groomed morally and academically to become competent personnel for the development of the country.

Political Participation

Participation of citizens is not only a civic responsibility; it is also a distinguishing feature of democracy. In fact, without significant citizens’ involvement in the political process, democratic system falls short of its goal. However, individual full participation in making societal choices and decisions is a national outcome of the endowment of individual dignity because it contributes to individual self-development. Responsibility for the governing of one’s own conduct develops one’s dignity. In particular, full individual participations within the local institutions contribute to the creation of community solidarity because everyone feels involved in what is going on relative to their welfare.⁵ Individual full participation boils down to popular participation and is expected to express their wishes on issues of governance.

Thus, political participation can be viewed as those voluntary activities by which members of a society share in the selection of rulers and directly or indirectly in the formation of public policy. It can be argued that

political participation is not only relevant to the individual but also crucial to the state/nation as its survival is contingent on the extent to which the citizens are involved in its activities. One can therefore say that the extent of individual participation in the political process also gives a basic idea of the level of development of that society; although the level of development of a particular society can sometimes influence the extent of political participation of the citizenry. Nevertheless, the political participation which entails the voluntary involvements of the citizens in the choice of their leaders and in the policy formulation and implementation process of their society affords the people a sense of belonging and a say in how they are governed⁶.

Citizenship

Citizenship implies a genuine equal access to participation in the management of public affairs-political dimension (exercise of authority and legitimacy of power), legal (judicial and legislative power) and economic (management and distribution of wealth). In other words, citizenship covers all social life. Moreover, citizenship refers to the status of those who are full members of a political community and who owe allegiance to the government and are entitled to its protection and political rights. Thus, citizens of a country are accorded a set of civil, political and social rights by the state which distinguish citizens from aliens. In addition, citizens of a country enjoy rights and liberties. Citizenship not only confers rights and protection to the citizens but also imposes responsibilities and obligations on them based on 'participation' and 'process'. Thus, it means the effective, informed engagement of individuals in their communities and in broader society around issues relating to the public domain.

Citizenship Education

Citizenship Education is the preparation of individuals to participate as active responsible citizens in a polity. It aims to empower individuals to engage in wider community through education. It is made up different elements- knowledge, skills and values but there is wide disagreement about the role, nature and relative importance of each of the elements.

IV. GENERAL STUDIES PROGRAMME IN FEDERAL POLYTECHNIC, ADO-EKITI

General Studies Courses were included in the curriculum of Polytechnics by the National Board for Technical Education so that students can improve their communication skills (oral and written) and the understanding of the environment where they live, work and make good contributions as worthy citizens of their country and the world at large.⁵ For Federal Polytechnic Ado-Ekiti, the General Studies Courses were handled by the General Studies Department under English and Liberal Studies Units. The English Language and Communication are designed to enable students acquire the necessary communication skills, learn the techniques of formal correspondence and are exposed to Literature in English and the rudimentary knowledge of grammar that can make them write projects and articles in standard journals.

The Liberal Studies courses offer students a variety of experiences. These include Citizenship Education, Sociology, Physics, Economics, History, Research Methods, Industrial Management, Government, International Relations and Philosophy. Its objectives include

- *exposing students to the basic concepts of Nigerian Constitution,
- *creating awareness of Nigerian Political Institutions,
- *acquiring the knowledge of basic elements of Sociology;
- *understanding society and changes in the environment,
- *understanding family as a basic unit of society
- *enabling students in non-science disciplines to appreciate the application of science to everyday life,
- *introducing students to the relationship between Sociology and Medicine,
- * exposing engineering students to basic Economic concepts and
- *acquainting students with general historical development of the African Continent, from the earliest times to the present⁶.

V. METHODOLOGY

a. Study Area

The work was a case study research because the researchers based the investigation on a single higher institution- Federal Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti.

b. Instrument

The study made use of questionnaire as instrument of study and the targeted population of the study was 240 students who were selected using the simple random sampling technique in the four Schools in The Federal Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti.

c. Analysis of data

Data gathered were analysed using the simple percentage.

VI. PERSONAL DATA OF RESPONDENTS

240 questionnaires were distributed across the four schools in the Federal Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti. The Schools are School of Business, School of Science, School of Engineering and School of Environmental Studies. 220 questionnaires were successfully filled and returned. The respondents are from fifteen states of the federation namely –Abia, Anambra, Delta, Ebonyi, Edo, Ekiti, Enugu, Imo, Kogi, Kwara, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Oyo. However, students from the North West and North East were not among the respondents. This may be because students from these zones are not on the school enrolment which may not be unconnected to the far distance between the institution and the two zones. 139 of the respondents were male while 81 were female as shown in the table below.

Table 1 Distribution of Respondents by Sex

Sex	No of Respondents	%
Male	139	63
Female	81	37
Total	220	100

Table 2 AgeDistribution of Respondents

Age-Group	Distribution	%
16-20	55	25
21-25	75	34
26-30	90	41
Total	220	100

Table 3 Distribution of Respondents by School

Schools	No Distributed	No Returned	%
Business Studies	60	58	26
Engineering	60	50	23
Environmental Studies	60	56	25.5
Science & Computer Studies	60	56	25.5
Total	240	220	100

VII. DATA ANALYSIS

Table 4 Citizenship Education enhances knowledge of Constitutional Development

Responses	No of Respondents	%
Agree	210	95
Strongly Agree	5	2.3
Disagree	4	2
Strongly Disagree	-	-
Undecided	1	0.5
Total	220	100

Table5Citizenship Education classes engender Political Participation of Respondents

Responses	No of Respondents	%
Agree	176	80
Strongly Agree	-	-
Disagree	42	19.1
Strongly Disagree	-	-
Undecided	2	0.9
Total	220	100

Table 6 Levels of Political Participation of Respondents in Campus Politics after attending Citizenship Education Classes

Pol. Participation	Respondents that Participated (%)	Respondents that did not participate (%)	Total (%)
Registering as voters	220 (100)	-	220 (100)

Campaigning for Candidates/Attending political rallies	40 (18)	180 (82)	220 (100)
Contesting as candidates	5 (2.3)	215 (97.7)	220 (100)
Voting	200 (91)	20 (9)	220 (100)
All of the above	5 (2.3)	215 (97.7)	220 (100)

Table 7 Levels of Political Participation of Respondents during 2015 General Elections

Pol. Participation	Respondents that participated (%)	Respondents that did not participate (%)	Total (%)
Registering as voters	200 (91)	20(9)	220 (100)
Campaigning for Candidates/Attending Political Rallies	30 (14)	190 (86)	220 (100)
INEC Ad hoc officials/Party Agents	33 (15)	187 (85)	220 (100)
Voting	40 (18)	180 (82)	220 (100)
All of the above	10(4.5)	210 (95.5)	220 (100)

Table 8 Reasons for low level of participation in the voting exercise in the 2015 General Elections

Reasons	No of Respondents	%
Lack of trust in politicians	34	19
Violence & insecurity	24	13.3
Monetisation of politics	36	20
Religious	36	20
Lack of confidence in INEC	15	8.3
No means of Transportation	15	8.3
Under aged	5	2.7
Not interested	15	8.3
Total	180	100

VIII. DISCUSSION

Almost all the respondents (97.3%) agreed that the study of the Citizenship Education has enhanced their knowledge of the country’s constitutional development (See Table 4). This may be likely because constitutional development is one of the core teachings of Citizenship Education. Table 5 shows that Citizenship Education has engendered political participation of the respondents but it is appalling that majority indicated their participation in voters’ registration and voting exercise in campus politics and only 4.5% of the respondents participated at all levels of participation indicated in the questionnaire (see Table 6). The reasons for their inactive participation in campus politics are fear of academic failure, financial implications of contesting and cult activities that are prevalent in our citadel of learning across the country.

Moreover, during the 2015 General Elections, 91% (200) of the respondents participated only in registering as voters, while fewer (18%) participated in the voting exercise; 15% participated either as INEC Ad hoc officials or party agents, 14% attended political rallies and only 4.5% participated in all political participation indicated in the questionnaire (see Table 7). Some of the reasons why they (180 respondents) did not exercise their voting rights were: religious, no means of transportation to the polling centers, lack of confidence in the electoral process, lack of trust in the politicians, monetization of politics, violence while few (2.7%) are under-aged (See Table 8).

Furthermore, the study shows that through Citizenship Education the respondents are well-grounded in the knowledge of their fundamental human rights but had little knowledge of the arts of governance. This is basically because they believe that governance is in the realm of the politicians and the social stigma associated with politics (thuggery, falsehood, failed promises, and corruption) does not encourage the respondents to be interested in governance. They are also of the opinion that cult and cultism is a strong phenomenon in Nigerian politics, politicking and governance.

It is also crystal clear from the study that the teaching of Citizenship Education has enhanced the knowledge of students about the Nigeria's peoples and cultures. Also, the respondents have adequate knowledge of their civic responsibilities through Citizenship Education classes; but only 35% are ready to fulfill these responsibilities. The responses of the majority portray their disappointment in the government and political system in which they alleged that the government has failed to fulfill her responsibilities to the citizenry and therefore, there is no reason for the citizenry to fulfill their own responsibilities to the government/ nation. Thus, general opinion from the study shows a high level of disappointment in how the politicians are governing the nation thereby, making patriotism of the citizen to be at the lowest ebb.

IX. CONCLUSION

It can be inferred therefore, that the knowledge of civic responsibilities has not been adequately translated into actions by the respondents in the society using the respondents as a case study. Though, the study of Citizenship Education had made the students better prepared to function in the political system but they lack the will power to enforce their fundamental human rights and participate in politics, politicking and governance majorly because of wrong conception of politics, lack of trust in politicians and governance which have led to lack of patriotism on the part of the citizenry. Thus, it can be inferred therefore, that the knowledge of the country's constitutional development, civic responsibilities, arts of governance, fundamental human rights has not been properly translated by the respondents into actions for the benefits of the society.

X. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made.

1. It is recommended that there is the need for political education in Nigeria which should not be limited to school system as it is shown in the study that Citizenship Education has enhanced the knowledge of the students about their political system but this was not adequately translated into actions by actively participating in the political process. Thus, this political education should embrace both formal and informal approaches so that it may engender active political participation of the citizenry. It is expected that the mass media and civil societies would rise up to the task of mass political enlightenment to let the citizens know the dangers in political apathy.
2. Our political leaders are also expected to provide good and democratic governance as this will restore the citizens' trust in the political system. This will invariably restore the spirit of patriotism in the citizenry.
3. For Nigerians to be patriotic, it means that the injustice in terms of lopsided political appointments must be addressed and every part of the country should be carried along without any form of marginalization. Until this is done, the study of Citizenship Education in higher institutions may not achieve its primary aims of producing well-grounded and rounded graduates who can favourably compete with their counterparts in other parts of the globe.

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