DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

USMAN SYLVESTER GBARI (Ph.D)
gbariusman25@yahoo.com

AND

ANSELM IKENNA ODO
Department of Educational Foundations
Nasarawa State University, Keffi
Email- anselmikenna4us@gmail.com

ABSTRACT
This paper sought to explore democratic education as a means of achieving national development. In Nigeria, democratic education seems to only be observed in theory and not practice. This might be the outcome of inability to abide by democratic educational practices. However, a lot of issues arose from the impracticability of democratic education which includes students being marginalized and having myopic knowledge of democratic issues. The researchers opine that as a way of achieving national development, education should be a tool of promoting human dignity, respect for individuals, promotion of moral, social, cultural and scientific ideologies for mature political stability. The paper concludes that democratic education begins on the premise that everyone is unique, and has different ways of learning. By supporting the individual development of each young person within a caring community, democratic education would help young people learn about themselves, engage with the world around them, and become positive and contributing members of society. The researchers recommended that people should be educated very well on the process of the rule of law so that irrespective of one’s political position, there would be equality before the law. Patience and tolerance as part of educational values should be imparted to all citizens irrespective of tribe, ethnic affiliation or religious background.

Keywords: Democratic Education, Panacea, National Development

INTRODUCTION
Education is a cardinal key for the developmental process. The influence of education can be mirrored in the social, political economic and cultural development of a society as it is essential for the strengthening of democracy. However, in order to achieve democratic education, it is necessary to create awareness among people about democracy and its benefits. The best way to educate people about democracy therefore, is to incorporate democratic education in schools.

Democracy as a system influences the structure of societies as it provides opportunities for different political positions. Moreover, democracy helps to transform the ideologies of
many societies including Nigeria. Some of the attributes of democracy include equality, social and political participation, freedom of decision, freedom of speech and freedom of association. All these are important in the realization of political and democratic goals. Implementing fundamental democratic values can only be achievable through educational institutions incorporating democratic practices and values in their curricular.

THE CONCEPT OF DEMOCRACY

Democracy is a ubiquitous term with a controversial challenge. Its challenges are not as a result of ambiguity like many political terms; rather, it is as a result of various individuals’ conception of the concept. For example, one will regard a particular instance as a good example of democracy while others will refute and reject it. Democracy is from two Greek words - ‘demos’ which means people and ‘Kratios’ which means to rule. Together the concept means the rule of the people. This concept was coined by Herodotus (Gbari, 2012). Herodotus was a powerful Greek historian of his time in the city state of Athens. Going further on the clarification of the concept, Scatcher (1999) states that democracy is a system of government in which rulers are responsible and accountable for their actions in the public realm by the citizens acting directly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives. Gbari (2012) observed that Scatcher’s conception of democracy associates with its principle of accountability and its forms of representative government.

On the other hand, Dewey (1916) asserts that democracy is regarded as a ‘way of life’ interrelated with the perceptions and assumptions, common experiences of individuals and it is about living together. So, it can be stated that democracy is not a static concept but a dynamic, active and changing process. In line with this, Dewey in Gutek (2001) stated that an ideal democracy is in need of high level educated people so that they can be aware of the consciousness of the social duties of political life and responsibilities. Otherwise, as Plato in Gözütok (2004) stated, ‘when the education of people isn’t enough, leaders’ insatiable wishes that aren’t dependent on certain principles can convert democracy easily into demagogy and despotism.

That is why Adewole (1989) stated that the practical problem of democracy is by viewing democracy in representative terms with some institutional requirements built into the system. This include consultation, freedom of expression, opinion and association, rule of law and accountability.

However, Dipty-Subba (2014) noticed that democracy is based on faith in the dignity and worth of every single individual as a human being. The object of democratic education is, therefore, the full, all-round development of every individual’s personality. That is an
education to initiate the students into the many-sided art of living in a community. It is obvious, however, that an individual cannot live and develop alone. No education is worth anything if it does not inculcate the qualities necessary for living graciously, harmoniously and efficiently with one’s fellow men. Democracy, as explained by Abraham Lincoln, is the government of the people by the people and for the people.

The Concept of Democratic Education

Democratic education is the act of impacting democratic values to children or adults so that they can be actively involved in democratic political process for worthwhile democratic dispensation. Önder Şanlı and Malatya (2015) opine that democratic education is the process of educating society by means of education activities by transferring the principles and rules of democracy, human rights and freedoms being transferred into open or closed goals in education programmes. That is to say that in democratic education, there is no form of indoctrination. In the same vein, Gökçe (2005) stated that democratic education is a kind of education that depends on the power of an individual’s comprehension but not according to people’s classs, race, sex, diversity of an thoughts. However, the main aim of democratic education is to internalize democratic values. Garrison (2001) therefore, asserted that if education is constituted on democratic values, it will be widely accepted that it should be a means of man’s happiness and development.

PROBLEMS OF POOR DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION

In Nigeria, there are a lot of challenges to the implementation of democratic education. There are cases of egoistic tendencies, I don’t care attitude of leaders, lack of commitment to national values, etc. Gbari (2012) itemized problems associated with poor democratic education as follows:

- Very high electoral malpractices
- Thuggery and political assassination of rival group members
- Ethnic and tribal political leadership tussle leading to killing and destruction of property.
- Religious blasphemy and discrimination
- Ignorance and poverty level of some members of the electorate which makes them scramble for money.
- High corruption rate.
- Illiteracy and ignorance
- Poor moral and spiritual values
- Injustice
Democratic education as a means of achieving national development in Nigeria

Democratic education is an unarguable solution to the problem of national development as it has a positive impact on almost all the sectors of development in a nation. For example, it fosters cultural development, peace, justice, agricultural and industrial development. Buttressing democratic education as a panacea for national development, Waghid (2004) observes that democratic education is often specifically emancipatory, with the students’ voices being equal to the teachers.

Democratic education has developed the real democracy through active participation by all those involved in classrooms and educational institutions. By teaching and learning democratic principles, students will possess an intellectual capability, because power is shared rather than appropriated in advance by a minority of people. Education, in its various forms, is basically authoritarian, since one person, or small groups of people make decisions about ‘what to learn, when to learn, how to learn, how to assess learning, and the nature of the learning environment’ (Roger-Walters, 2017). Furthermore, such decisions of what to learn, how to learn and when to learn are taken in course planning committees and accreditation boards often before the students have even enrolled on a course or met together as a group.

Democratic education in secondary schools gives students the power to make decisions on their learning. This can be facilitated by democratic approaches that encourage students to undertake a co-operative learning approach to study through, say a group project. This means that students take on decision making about some content and method. Group work can be flexible enough to avoid being stifled by an externally imposed assessment. Therefore, whilst some current changes in education involve moves to create ever larger institutions, and a closely prescribed curriculum, certain classes may remain small, and group work may still exist. Indeed, with more emphasis on course and project work, students and staff will be able to take joint decisions on educational matters.

Democratic education in the primary school encourages a realization in pupils that they are valued as people, and that they have a positive role to play in creating and being involved in educational issues. Relationships between pupils and teachers will gradually improve as they work democratically together to create a positive environment.

In a political arena, democratic education will provide the framework for shaping political cultures, which in itself is an integral part of the shared culture of society. Democratic
culture consists of principles derivable from philosophical and ethical themes within an integrated system of thought that extols such values as human and public freedom, and social justice. Public freedom which democratic education teaches is about human and civil rights and the right to political participation; while social justice reaffirms and reechoes the themes and principles of universal adult suffrage to achieve democratic purposes of equal ‘citizenship’ and faith in the rule of law. These are themes commonly found in the western model of democracy, in most liberal democracies, and representative majoritarian democracy model.

Democratic education also encourages political stability as the political system that is valid in a democratic society and the philosophy is based on ‘human centeredness’ via educational institutions. In such a society, the aim of education is to make the world a more livable place for individuals. And also its aim is to establish an environment and opportunities, possibilities that are necessary means for human rights, freedoms, honors, happiness and development. For educational institutions to succeed therefore, they must place democratic education in the content dimension.

Democratic education will foster justice for national development. By inculcating democratic education in the curriculum, active participation of students in the democratic process will be encouraged. It will enable an individual to express his opinions sincerely. For instance, students who take responsibility for works that are related with themselves and their schools have a very important place in providing order and discipline at school. In this sense, activities such as students’ clubs at schools, the activities of the school council, the election of students’ representatives, the election of class representatives, etc, will be done by students based on knowledge and it will be their contribution to the development of democratic culture.

Considering the social development of a nation, democratic education is about knowledge, about democratic awareness, about what people believe and establish, regarding their relationships to the political system of governance; their relations, for instance, with the legislature, institutional structures and legal system. This knowledge enables them to understand how they actually relate and should relate with political objects, issues and events around them, and to accordingly adjust their behaviour to realize democratic purposes and good governance. As a result of this, Reid, Bjarne and Jutta (2008) stated that democratic education disseminates concepts and practices that result in integrated democratic awareness essentially through public outlets, and so it takes place at public and official levels, as well as among the ruling elites.

Democratic education resolves conflicts and fosters peace for national development. This is because democratic education develops a sense of community among a group of
students and a partnership between teachers and learners based on mutual trust in the capability and creative ability of all those involved in the learning process.

Moreover, the movement to promote real participatory democracy through the medium of education involves important procedural values. These include tolerance of diversity, mutual respect between individuals and groups, a respect for evidence in forming opinions, a willingness to be open to the possibility of changing one’s mind in the light of such evidence, the possession of a critical stance towards political information and finally, seeing that all people have equal social and political rights as human beings. These relate very closely to some of the aims of peace education, since building upon the shared aspects of being human and relating toward one another with tolerance and kindness are, arguably, shared objectives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To actualise democratic education as a means of achieving to national development, the following recommendations are therefore made:

1. Teachers should encourage learners on democratic participation through teaching and organization of seminars for the electorate.
2. Teachers should uphold good ethical values and the eradication of ignorance and illiteracy should be attained adequately through a good educational process geared towards democratic values.
3. Moral education inculcated through democratic education can reduce thuggery and political assassinations/ attempts on rival and powerful groups. Therefore, schools should advocate Education For All (EFA).
4. People should also be educated very well on the process of the rule of law so that irrespective of one’s political position, there should be equality before the law of the land.
5. Patience and tolerance should be part of the educational values to be imparted to all citizens irrespective of tribe, ethnic affiliation or religious background.

CONCLUSION

In democratic education, student centered training fosters rapid knowledge to individuals who have the skill of rational and scientific thinking. This is because democratic education involves active participation from students. Therefore, it will make the students to be able to share knowledge, have the ability of communication, use technology efficiently. Again, democratic education has embraced the common values of mankind. That is to say that it has increased creativity, productivity, importance of team work, and it has given the way to learn and internalise life long learning.
With democratic education at school and in the classroom, student centered practices and activities that provide students’ participation will serve the aim of carrying out the education process with democratic values. It is important that school administrators and teacher training programmes should be organized and in-service training courses should be given to the executives. Democratic education begins with the premise that everyone is unique, so each of us has a different way of learning. By supporting the individual development of each young person within a caring community, democratic education will help young people learn about themselves, engage with the world around them, and become positive and contributing members of society.

REFERENCES


