

**CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION: AN INSTRUMENT FOR UNITY  
AND STABILITY IN NIGERIA**

**BY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The wave of ethnic violence and religious crises in Nigeria has reached such an alarming level that, if not arrested, may break up the country. It is against this background that this paper considers the use of citizenship education as a means by which Nigeria can attain the much needed unity and stability. The purpose of this paper is to examine the concept of citizenship education and the justification for its inclusion in the curriculum. This paper concludes that citizenship education should be introduced at all levels of education and that if it is carefully and appropriately implemented, Nigeria will be more stable, strong and united.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Nigeria as a nation is currently at the cross road. There is widespread inter-religious crisis, as well as inter and intra-ethnic violence in the country. Among these crises are Niger delta crisis, religious riot in the North due to the adoption of sharia law by some northern states, call for confederacy and secession, suspicion and distrust among the various ethnic groups. Several conscious efforts have been made by the government to maintain peace and stability in Nigeria without much success. For instance, the inauguration of Council of Inter-religious Harmony by the federal government. This council is co-headed by the Sultan of Sokoto, the president of Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs and the national president of Christian Association of Nigeria.

Various suggestions from well-meaning individuals are being made to ensure that Nigeria remains an indivisible entity where every Nigerian will consider himself a Nigerian first before seeing himself as a Yoruba, Igbo or Hausa and so on. In other words, a Nigeria in which the national consciousness of her citizens will be high. This may be achieved through citizenship education. Citizenship education has become an increasingly important means for countries to educate their citizens about their rights and responsibilities. Increasing pluralism within states has encouraged the development of citizenship education that goes beyond simple 'patriotic' models of citizenship requiring uncritical loyalty to their ethnic group.

## **Roles of Education**

In recent times, much attention has been devoted to the roles the school is expected to play in the training of good citizens in Nigeria. The emphasis placed on education is borne out of the fact, as stated by Federal Government of Nigeria (2004), that education is considered a potent instrument for change and development. Probably, that is why Iyewarun (1989) asserts that education is an instrument by which young members are brought up and socialized so as to become useful and active members of the society. However, the role of education differs from culture to culture. In support of this view, Metzieobi, Domike and Osakwe (1996) notes that the emphasis placed on the goals of education ranges from culture to culture and society to society. To him, while some people see education as an instrument for achieving a specific objective, others see it as a means of training the mind and intellect. Ukeje (1996) supports this view by stating that some people view education as an instrument for achieving a specific objective such as socialization and means of social mobility while others see education as a means of inculcating a particular ideology.

From a different perspective, Yusuf (2005) observes that the school should not be used as an instrument for training in citizenship only, rather it should be directed at the training of the mind and the development of the intellect. Nevertheless, it is noted that many educationists and social studies educators such as Metzieobi (2000), Ezegbe (1993), Obike (1993) and Osakwe (1993) are of the opinion that education is an effective instrument for citizenship and civic responsibility and the school has always been used to perpetuate the tradition of the society. In the same vein, Coker (1970) asserts that the school has

always served as a major channel for inculcating in its members independence, self reliance, responsibility and moral uprightness. Probably that is why Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) has as one of its educational objectives, the inculcation of right type of attitude for the survival of individual and the Nigerian society.

In this present situation that Nigerian unity and democracy is under threat, education can be used to foster much needed unity for the survival of the nation. In this 21st century, and the unfortunate inter-ethnic and religious clashes including leadership crises that have become a common occurrence in Nigeria, it becomes imperative to introduce citizenship education as it relates to national consciousness and national unity. Omare (1999) observes that at various times, the need arises for countries to seek solution to pressing problems of national importance, and this has been the position of various countries in search of political stability, unity, peace and progress, and the instrument employed always to achieve unity and national consciousness is education. Hence, education for good citizenship in a democratic setting needs experiences in a democratic process and democratic living (UNESCO, 2005).

### **Need for Citizenship Education in Nigeria**

The need for national unity and stability is greater now in Nigeria than ever before, especially with rampant ethnic violence and religious crises. Many highly placed Nigerians on the pages of newspapers such as Odumegwu Ojukwu, Umaru Dikko, and Adesanya Abraham have often described *one- Nigeria* as temporarily a dream and utopia (Punch, 1999). Education is a potent instrument that can be used to foster peace and unity. Therefore we should evolve a type of education that will inculcate in the learners the ideal of national consciousness and awareness. In essence citizenship education should be introduced at all

levels of our educational system. This position, on the roles of education is a consequence of the experience of some other countries.

According to Metzieobi, Domike and Osakwe (1996), Sparta which was essentially a military and aristocratic city transformed Homer's chivalric type of education into a system that served its political and military purposes. In the same vein, Adeyinka (1992) cited the communist philosophy of the U.S. S. R which was different from that of pre-revolution Russia, that the communist party found it necessary to transform not only the social system but the attitudes, loyalty and thinking of Soviet people. The instrument used for the change was education, and within a few years, Soviet Union was transformed from an agrarian society to an industrialized powerful state. Also in like manner, Omare (1999) notes that West Germany was concerned with preparing students to acquire political knowledge, values and skills for democratic right in a free nation. Hence, political education was introduced at both federal and state levels of German education. Okilo (1993) notes that education has an influence on the quality of a society and that the curriculum has always been used in search of a better world. He concludes that citizenship was the main purpose of American education. Iyamu (1999) defines citizenship education as a conscious effort to inculcate in the youth, a set of values and attitude contingent on the need and problems of the society. To Osakwe (1993), citizenship education conveys to the learners, the body of knowledge, set of values and behavioural orientation that are considered vital and necessary for the sustenance and well being of the people.

In other words, education for citizenship is a set of practices and activities aimed at making young people and adults better equipped to participate actively in democratic life by assuming and exercising their rights and responsibilities in society. That is why Osakwe and Itejere

(1993) define citizenship education as a system for the acquisition and internalization of the values, sentiment and norms of society in which they live and actually get involved to ensure that the common good of the citizens is catered for including resisting anti-social and unguided youthful exuberance. Probably, that is why Omare (1999) states that the manifestation of citizenship education can be seen in the behavior trait such as critical thinking, political activism, inquiry, goals and value of good citizenship. According to Dave (2006), 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. In other words, citizenship education requires a citizen to be well informed, gather facts, reject ethnocentrism, religious jingoism and encourage national consciousness. That means that citizenship education will develop in individual skills, attitudes and values that will enable them to show concern for the wellbeing and dignity of others, respecting the worth of others and approaching civil decision in a rational manner.

Studies have shown that there is high degree of ethnocentrism among Nigerians. Metzieobi, Domike and Osakwe (1996) reported in his study that among the Igbos and Yorubas, friendship and marriage would be ethnically determined. As a result of distrust and suspicion, various Nigerian leaders, such as Wole Soyinka, Odumegwu Ojukwu have called for a sovereign national conference to re- negotiate Nigerian unity on the pages of Nigerian newspapers and rotation of the presidency among the six geo- political zones. In addition, there has been ethnic violence among the Yorubas and the Ijaws, and also religious crisis as a result of adoption of Sharia law in the northern part of Nigeria. Therefore, development of national awareness is essential in Nigeria at this critical

time of our national history. Nigerian leaders are conscious of only their ethnic background and are suspicious of other ethnic group.

There has been an unfortunate feeling of general despondency on the part of many Nigerians. Obasanjo (1999) expressed this opinion while addressing Ijaw leaders as a reaction to ethnic violence embarked upon by the Ijaw youth in the Niger Delta area. He further stated that Nigerians were not patriotic and lacked sense of national consciousness. This, he said was because they had lost confidence on one Nigeria and therefore spent incalculable efforts in fruitless sectional, ethnic and religious quarrels. It is the belief of this paper that in order to avoid national disintegration, the school can be used to achieve national consciousness stability and unity by teaching citizenship education.

In an attempt to foster national unity, the federal government, in the past, has introduced Universal Basic Education (U. B. E), established unity secondary schools otherwise called Federal Government Colleges, the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) and the National Youth Service Corps scheme.

While launching Universal Basic Education in Sokoto State, President Obasanjo noted that the scheme has one of its objectives the correction of educational imbalance in the country. Though the provision of educational balance in the country is necessary it is not sufficient in a country like Nigeria where there is prevalence of ethnic and religious crises. In order to create a sense of national consciousness and patriotism in the minds of Nigerians, citizenship education should be made compulsory at all levels of education in Nigeria. In other words, the school curriculum must be so redesigned as to include citizenship education that would give the learners, experiences needed to achieve national objectives.



## **Roles of Citizenship Education in Nigeria**

It is agonizing that our school system has provided international studies at the expense of national education. Fafunwa (1974) notes that students in Nigeria know more about European people than Nigerians who belong to ethnic groups different from their own. To create trust and confidence among Nigerians, Metzieobi, Domike and Osakwe (1996) opines that among Nigerians, it is necessary to provide Nigerians the type of education that is characterized by Nigerian intercultural education. By defining 'citizenship' in terms of human rights and civic responsibilities, citizenship education attempts to avoid concepts of 'citizenship' that define nationality in terms of ethnic, religious or cultural identity.

It has therefore become the norm for modern citizenship education to have a strong human rights values base, to make specific reference to children's rights and address issues related to diversity and the rights of minorities within society. A comprehensive human rights education takes account of citizenship, and considers that good citizenship is connected with human rights as a whole. Conversely, citizenship education which trains citizens to be aware of the human and political issues at stake in their society or nation, requires from each citizen ethical and moral qualities. All forms of citizenship education aim at shaping respect for others by fostering a spirit of tolerance and peace.

Citizenship education which is the major focus of social studies has been used in many countries like the United States of America for solving political problems. Awosolu (1993) notes that this type of education can be used to prepare members of plural societies. Omare (1999) states that citizenship education trains the mind of people in the direction of what is required for a stable and enduring democracy.

Citizenship education analyses man in all aspects of environments like social studies. It considers social, economic, political, religious, cultural and technological aspects of life.

The teaching of citizenship education enables learners to think beyond their individual and ethnic interests; thereby making them to tolerate and respect the views of others. It is citizenship education that will enhance unity and stability and human right. According to Yusuf (2005), citizenship education which has as important components of value education could serve as an instrument for bringing about desirable positive change in the Nigerian value orientation. It determines action and shapes the direction in which an individual operates in a given situation. Obike (1993) states that, the people's value orientation and their social attitude expressed through services rendered to one another constitute the bedrock upon which members of the society depend for their survival.

However, the problem with Nigeria is Nigerians themselves because of their negative value orientation. In the opinion of the writer of this paper, this negative value orientation may be traced to the elitist type of education inherited from the former colonial authority. Citizenship education can be used to produce effective citizenship which is a basic requirement of a strong and united nation. Iyewarun (1989) observes that during the colonial years, education was used to inculcate religious ideas and values. To him, the evangelical efforts succeeded partly because they started with children at the elementary stage. In the United States of America, inculcation of national consciousness and national pride became successful using education (Omare, 1999).

The Federal Government of Nigeria observes that, education can be used to effect changes in the attitude and behavior of learners (FRN; 2004). Therefore, citizenship education when introduced would foster mutual respect among different ethnic groups in Nigeria. Obasanjo.

(2000) observes that Nigerians have a sense of territorial unity only rather than national unity. He therefore suggests that it is in the national interest that these ethnic groups develop respect for each other's value system. This can only be achieved if they know and understand each other's custom. In support of this view, Obike (1993) notes that citizenship education teaches attitudes and values in current affairs and include the ways of democracy which include democratic ideas, skills and techniques required for democratic actions.

He states further that, citizenship education could bring about understanding of other ethnic groups in our society. UNESCO (2005) also advocates a citizenship education with an intrinsic human rights component based on universal international instruments such as the United Nations General Assembly Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) in New York and the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) including World Conference on Human Right in Vienna, Austria.

As stated in UNESCO's Integrated Framework of Action on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Democracy (2005) education must prepare citizens to cope with difficult and uncertain situations and fit them for personal autonomy and responsibility. Awareness of personal responsibility must be linked to recognition of the value of civic commitment, of joining together with others to solve problems and to work for a just, peaceful and democratic community.

The concept of education for citizenship is framed within the education for all movement not only through its goal number six in regard to improving the quality and relevance of education, but, more fundamentally, by setting the aims of education and its underlying values

Citizenship education in our school system will inculcate national moral values and develop a truly patriotic citizen whose consciousness

will transcend its ethnic boundary, and as a consequence produce an educated citizen, who knows his duties to his country. At this trying period of our national history, Nigeria requires citizens that are capable of tackling problems of unity and development. Nigeria should also borrow ideas from developed countries like USA where a citizenship education form of social studies has been used to build a highly developed sense of national consciousness.

### **Curriculum of Citizenship Education**

Bernard (2006), one of the architects of citizenship education in British schools, stated that 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, tends to create apathetic subjects rather than active citizens.

He states further that citizenship education does not merely seek to study social problems in the society but it tries to identify them, analyse them and find solutions to them. Citizenship education is one of such rare fields which can provide this affective aspect of education. He therefore suggests that citizenship education requires careful selection of objectives, content and procedure. If carefully and appropriately directed, it can prepare a student to participate effectively in the progress of his community on the teaching of citizenship education, Shaver and Berlak (1968) argue that citizenship education should not be programmed upon the ideas of what is desirable but upon the empirical and virtual supposition about what is and will be.

Since citizenship education analyses man in its entire ramification, Omare (1999) suggests the multi disciplinary approach of social studies to the study of citizenship education. This is because; it takes cognizance of the social, economic, political, religious, cultural and

technological aspects of life. He also believes that it will broaden the horizon of the student and make him operate beyond parochial levels of ethnicity and religion.

Citizenship education, according to Obike (1993) teaches attitudes and values, and therefore, role playing as a teaching method can help the democratic process and national consciousness in leadership training programme. The emphasis on the affective domain in citizenship education will encourage feelings of patriotism and national consciousness in individuals.

Iyewarun (1989) states that the need for citizenship education includes the creation of many sided personalities equipped with practical knowledge and inspired by ideas so that they can make their way and fulfill their mission in a changing society. This may be the reason for Omare (1999) to observe the use of persuasion, socialization and indoctrination in teaching citizenship education as outlined by Dymanson and Gross (1982).

Beard (1932) emphasis, which is relevant to Nigerian society, is on the role that the American school should play in the development of its citizens who would be responsible for promoting the culture and participate fully in the social, economic and political life of their nation. The objectives of citizenship education, according to Iyewarun (1989) should aim at effecting positive changes in their student and inculcate in them sense of national consciousness.

Dymason and Gross's (1982) approaches to citizenship education can be followed. In citizenship education, contemporary issues and current events which would enable them to become well informed citizens can be taught. Citizenship education should also be taught using multi disciplinary approach so as to enable it to identify the link between the present and the past. The use of multi disciplinary approach will

enable the students to become actively involved and participate as effective students (Adebisi and Olawepo, 1997).

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

In this paper, it has been emphasized that citizenship education should be introduced at all levels of our educational system. It is against this background that the following recommendations on the strategy for the effective implementation of citizenship education are made.

- (i) Citizenship education should be introduced at all levels of teachers' training institutions. This is because teachers must be prepared and equipped to effect the needed change in the children. Teachers should be trained and this could be done through in-service training.
- (ii) Multi – disciplinary approach should be employed as a method of teaching citizenship education at higher level of education.
- (iii) For effective implementation, education should be made free and compulsory at least up to senior secondary school level. This is because students would have inculcated good citizenship at this level of education,
- (v) Researches should be conducted to identify major problems and support systems that may affect citizenship education. To do this, researchers should be encouraged by government to carry out meaningful studies.

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