

**THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION ON STUDENTS
OPINIONS ON POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND DEMOCRATIC REFORMS
IN NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the influence of social studies education on the sandwich students' opinion on political participation and democratic reforms in Nigeria. In carrying out the study, simple random sampling technique was used to select four hundred (400) sandwich students. Relevant data were collected using a twenty item researcher's constructed questionnaire. Chi-square statistics was used to test the two generated hypotheses. The findings showed that there was a significant difference in the opinions of social studies students and non-social studies students on political participation while no significant difference existed in opinions of both social studies and non-social studies students on democratic reforms. Based on these findings, it was recommended among others that social studies should be taught at all levels of the Nigerian education system to develop active and participating citizenry.

Introduction

Nigeria has had very long years of military rule. Out of the forty-five years of post independence Nigeria, the country has been ruled by the military for about thirty years. With the attainment of independence in 1960, the first republic lasted only six years before the military took over political power by force in 1966 and ruled for thirteen years before handing over power to a democratically elected government in 1979. The second republic lasted only four years and the military ruled for another 16 years and handed over power on the 29th May 1999. During this long period of military rule, it should be noted that political participation and democratic culture have been eroded to an extent that many of our institutions such as the family, education, religion, economy, and the judiciary are militarized. Probably, that is why Agabi (1999) noted that there is militarization of family and kinship relations with men assuming a militaristic attitude towards women and children, resulting in widespread domestic violence, abuse and antidemocratic tendencies within the civil society. He observed that adults beat children all the time, men beat women, some were killed or maimed, while the culprits were accountable to no one. In addition, there was an authoritarian orientation of civilian education administrators and government officials who ban legitimate staff and students unions. Agabi (1999) noted that traders speak of the practice of using army officers to collect debts or settle scores, the use of hired killers to murder rivals, and the use of religion rituals and sorcery in the spiritual warfare that is thought by some to a company trade. It was also observed that transport companies routinely hire armed escorts to protect the passengers from robbers but the armed men that the passengers usually encounter are at the countless military and police road blocks, brazenly extracting illegal tells from every passing driver, there by inflating transport fares. Some communities have adopted the barracks mentality of “might is right” especially in the contest for elective political office, characterised by huggery and indolence. Some traditional rulers run

secret cult with which they intimidate people in rural areas and extort money from them as fines without due process.

In its own view, Igbuzor (2004) noted that prolonged nature of military rule constricted democratic space, entrenched authoritarianism and nurtured militarism in Nigeria. The effect of military rule on political participation was deeply expressed by Adedeji (2003) who argued that whenever it (the military) exercises political power, military administration is perforce infected by the command system. Power is centralized and the approach to governance is inevitably top-down. Debate, discussion and dialogue are replaced by order, decree and command. Disagreement is tantamount to rebellion, and demonstrations are analogous to mutiny. Popular participation in governance is unthinkable. Thirty years of military government did succeed in turning Nigeria a highly centralized polity.

According to Citizens Forum for Constitutional Reform (2005), it is established all over the world that democratic system of government is regarded as the best form of government even though there is no agreement on the definition, content and form of democracy. One thing that is generally accepted is that democratic culture needed for the growing of democracy provides for political participation and dialogue. Probably, that is why Ogundare and Ogunsanya (2004) observed that there is the need for a new social contract and the democratic culture expected of a nation.

The military handed over political power in 1999 to a democratically elected government. Although Nigerians noted all the short-comings, including the outcome of the 1999 Election, they accepted the transition process because of the overwhelming consensus and commitment that the military must go. Immediately after the return to civilian rule in May 1999, agitation for democratic reforms started. This is because

during the military rule, according to Igbuzor (2004), the environment was hostile and intolerant of any debate on democratic reform. However, the return of civilian rule gave way for a more conducive environment to start. The needs for democratic reforms and increased political participation are borne out of the numerous crises and the spate of ethnic and religious violence threatening the Nigeria nascent democracy and corporate existence which are no doubt rooted in our social-economic and political history.

There were calls for political reforms by people. There were calls for sovereign national conference. That means there is need for government to listen. In responses to various calls for a national conference and democratic reforms, the government inaugurated a committee on national political reform conference that looked into the problems facing the country. However, it should be noted that government appointees form the large percentage of the members of the committee, which subverted the will of the people. A careful reading of the agenda of the national political reform conference showed contentious issues such as revenue allocation, derivation and resource control, federalism, land use, system of government, state creation, power sharing among the three levels of government, peaceful coexistence, electoral law, society and defence among others.

According to Citizens Forum for Constitutional Reform (2005), the persistent spate of ethnic and religious violence in Nigeria confirms the simple fact that the 1999 constitution has defects and cannot provide the answer to Nigerian problems. Therefore, there is an urgent need to make constitution of and by the people through increased political participation and democratic reforms that will significantly address the problems confronting the country. The opportunity for making constitution of the people that can resolve intractable conflicts in the country is to increase the peoples

participation and democratic reforms, through inclusivity, diversity, participation, transparency and openness, autonomy, accountability and legitimacy. According to Citizens Forum for Constitutional Reforms (1999), inclusivity allows all voices and opinions including those of the minority groups to be heard and reflected. Diversity provides for the existing difference in terms of ethnic identity, language, religion and gender. This is because if this diversity is not reflected, the reform will not be democratic, legitimate and reflective of popular view.

The principle must also allow for participation that is, involve people at all levels in debating freely on matters affecting their lives. It must also ensure transparency and openness, which means that there should be no 'no go areas' and 'no hidden agenda'. The principle of autonomy provides for independence from government control, that is, the peoples participation should not be tied to the government while, legitimacy provides the people the opportunity to review government policies and be ensured that politicians have not eliminated their collective views. Finally, there should be periodic publication of report and progress of work in an open and transparent manner, that is, people should be informed of government's activities.

All the principles are teachable in schools through social studies. Perhaps, the best and easiest way of developing political participation and democratic culture is by teaching the principles mentioned above through social studies in our educational institutions in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Social studies as a school subject assists students to acquire the basic knowledge, skills and positive attitudes needed to be responsible citizens and contributing members of society (Alberta, 2000). Jekayinfa (2005) also observed that

one of the anticipated outcomes of social studies education is a sense of efficiency in analysing and participating in contemporary affairs, public policy matters and global issues as well as commitment to democratic values and ethnical standards. To accommodate the vast range of interest, abilities, needs and future direction of Nigerian students, social studies educators and teachers should shift emphasis from an over argued investment in content, methodology and process to real and tangible direction for practices in Nigerian schools.

In his own assessment, Andrew (2004) stated that there is a need to instigate a challenging analysis of concept development, critical thinking, students' creativity, and methods to develop the skills required by students, but generated through their own enquiries. The strength of a sound social studies course rests with the variety of skills and strategies employed by students in reality that are needed to face a changing society. Ideally, students will acquire knowledge, analyze, interpret their findings and apply by communicating their discovery in order to solve the problems that are facing Nigeria therefore, the role of social studies education, link as it is with citizenship education, is to cultivate a sense of national cohesion, loyalty and obligation to the country.

In line with this, Adaralegbe (1990) stated that one of the roles of social studies is to prepare the young people to be humane, rational, skilful in decision making, participating and responsible citizens in a world that is becoming increasingly complex and interdependent. Educational Equality Project (2005) stated that through social studies, students are provided with the tools necessary to make decisions, solve problems; understand the democratic needs, understand the national, state and local laws, interpret information in newspaper articles and reports; and understand political

activities. It states further that social studies prepares students to be responsible citizens, allows them to view and examine the various components of their society and teaches them to explore social problems and institutions. It is on this basis that there appears the need to examine the influence of social studies education on the students' opinions on political participation and democratic reforms in Nigeria. Therefore, the study examined the influence of social studies education on students' opinion on political participation and democratic reforms.

Purpose of the study

This study examined the influence of social studies education on students opinion on political participation and democratic reforms.

Specifically, the following statements of purpose are set out:

- a) To find out the difference in the opinion of social studies students on political participation;
- b) To find out the difference in the opinion of social studies students and non-social studies students on democratic reforms.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are:

- a) There is no significant difference in the opinion of social studies students and non-social studies students on political participation.
- b) There is no significant difference in the opinion of social studies students and non-social studies students on democratic reforms.

Methodology

A descriptive research of survey type using questionnaire was used in this study. A total of four hundred (400) sandwich students from the Centre for University Affiliated

Programmes, College of Education. (CUAP), Ilorin and Institute of Education, University of Ilorin made up the sample of the study. That is, two hundred social studies students and two hundred non-social studies students were purposively selected for the study. The sample consisted of two hundred and thirty (230) CUAP students and one hundred and seventy (170) Institute of Education students selected by simple random sampling technique.

The instrument for data collection was a twenty item Likert type questionnaire made by the researcher. The items consisted of two sections: A&B. section A consists of 10 items which deals with students' opinion on political participation while section B also consists of 10 items which relate to the opinions of students on democratic reform. The statements were to be responded to with 'strongly agreed', 'disagreed' and 'strongly disagreed' responses. Experts in item analysis, measurement and evaluation and social studies experts subjected the questionnaire to both face and construct validity. Its reliability was obtained through test and retest method which gave a co-efficient of 0.65 after analysis using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistics. The researcher personally visited the respondents for the purpose of administering the questionnaire. 400 copies of questionnaire were distributed and returned. Chi square was employed for the analysis of the data using SPSS

Results

The two hypotheses were tested to ascertain the significant difference in the opinion of students on political participation and democratic reform in Nigeria. Chi-Square statistic was employed using SPSS computer software for the analysis.

Hypotheses 1

There is no significant difference in the opinion of social studies students and non-social studies students on political participation. The finding is presented in Table 1

Table 1: Chi- square summary of difference in social studies students and non-social studies students' opinions on political participation.

No	Item	Respondents	SA	A	D	SD	Value	Assym Sig(2- side)	Dec isio n
1	Every citizen should belong to a political party	Social studies students	144	47	4	5	254.918a	.000	SD
		Non social Studies students	5	45	89	61			
2	People should be card carrying members of political parties	Social studies students	104	61	15	20	132.152a	.000	SD
		Non social Studies students	16	43	74	67			
3	Every citizen should attend political rallies	Social studies students	90	52	14	44	96.973a	.000	SD
		Non social Studies students	10	28	87	75			
4	Voting in elections is must for every citizen of Nigeria	Social studies students	71	69	51	9	132.038a	.000	SD
		Non social Studies students	26	37	47	90			
5	People should criticize their leaders for non performance	Social studies students	110	56	30	4	204.703a	.000	SD
		Non social Studies students	1	35	90	74			
6	Government should be accountable to the people	Social studies students	138	36	17	9	226.976a	.000	SD
		Non social Studies students	6	26	93	75			
7	People should have the power to influence government policies	Social studies students	106	84	1	9	279.813a	.000	SD
		Non social Studies students	5	20	91	84			
8	Citizen at all levels should participate in policy making	Social studies students	99	66	25	10	80.709a	.000	SD
		Non social Studies students	1	18	128	53			
9	People should be actively involved in policy implementation	Social studies students	59	99	11	31	111.087a	.000	SD
		Non social Studies students	2	33	89	76			
10	People should have the power to recall bad leaders	Social studies students	124	46	21	9	162.189a	.000	SD
		Non social Studies students	19	32	65	84			

Level of Significance= .05.

df= 3.

SD= Significant Difference

As shown in Table 1, significant difference existed between social studies and non- social studies students in their opinion on political participation. This is because the values of each of the items was .000, ($P < .05$).In addition, the total chi- square value when combined together also indicated .000 ($P < .05$). This means that the hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in the opinion of social studies students and non- social studies students on democratic reforms.

The result of the analysis is given in Table 2:

Table 2: Chi- square summary of difference in social studies students and non-social studies students' opinions on democratic reform.

No.	Item	Respondents	SA	A	D	SD	Value	Assym Sig(2-side)	Decision
1	There is a need for dialogue among Nigerians.	Social studies students	153	38	3	4	2.573a	.462	NS
		Non social Studies students	137	49	9	5			
2	There is a need for sovereign national conference	Social studies students	109	51	15	25	4.961a	.174	NS
		Non social Studies students	99	84	20	15			
3	The government should be the organizer of the conference	Social studies students	83	62	11	44	981a	.806	NS
		Non social Studies students	97	43	16	44			
4	Views of people of all works of life must be heard	Social studies students	67	77	49	7	.937a	.816	NS
		Non social Studies students	75	68	44	13			
5	Views of the all Nigerian people must be reflected	Social studies students	123	59	27	1	.218a	.975	NS
		Non social Studies students	121	58	20	1			
6	New peoples constitution must be must be developed	Social studies students	141	35	20	4	9.716a	.021	S
		Non social Studies students	135	37	18	10			
7	Referendum on the new constitution should be held	Social studies students	111	83	1	5	2.726a	.436	NS
		Non social Studies students	101	85	1	13			
8	Judiciary should have its independence	Social studies students	127	63	7	3	32.403a	.000	S
		Non social Studies students	42	31	58	69			
9	Citizenship education for citizenship rights should be taught at all levels of education	Social studies students	69	91	13	27	.100a	.992	NS
		Non social Studies students	64	99	9	28			
10	Nigerians should be given opportunity to negotiate Nigeria's unity	Social studies students	121	49	19	11	4.000a	.261	NS
		Non social Studies students	113	53	23	7			

Key SD= Significant Difference

NS= No Significant difference.

Level of Significance= .05

df= 3

As observed in Table 2, no significant difference existed in the opinion of social studies students and non social studies students on democratic reform. The

obtained Chi square values of items 1,2,3,4,5,7,9,10, were greater than .05 level of significant. Only items 6 and 8 showed that there was a significant difference in the value of item 6 which was .021 while the value for item 8 was .000. In addition the total value was .996. This means that the hypothesis is not rejected.

The following are the findings in this study:

1. A significant difference was observed in the opinion of social studies and non social studies students on political participation.
2. No significant difference existed in the opinion of social studies and non social studies students on democratic reform.

Discussion

This study investigated the influence of social studies education on students' opinions on political participation and democratic reforms. The results of the analysis of data in this study revealed that hypothesis one was rejected. In other words, there is a significant difference in the opinions of social studies students and non-social studies students on political participation. From the analysis, a total of 140(70%) respondents who were social studies students out of 200 had positive opinion about voting in elections while out of 200 non- social studies students, only a total of 63(31.5%) had positive opinion. That means the social studies students have a more positive opinion on political participation than non-social studies students. This finding is in line with Andrew (2004) who concluded that if social studies is taught at all levels of education, it provides education experiences for students as participating democratic citizens. The finding is also consistent with Sears and Hughes (1996) who concluded that social studies in form of citizenship education remains a training edge that provides a benchmark for the actual practice of political participation. The result of this study also

revealed that there is no significant difference between social studies students and non-social studies students in their opinions on democratic reform. The analysis showed that out of 10 items on democratic reform, 8 items had ($P > 0.05$). In other words both social studies students and non-social students have positive opinion and demanded more democratic reform in their response. This finding is in agreement with Igbuzor (2004) who observed that enthusiasm of people generally and the tempo of engagement to constitutional reform are high.

Conclusion and Recommendation

From the findings and discussion in this study, it can be concluded that the teaching of social studies at any level of education could influence the opinions of the students on political participation and democratic values. Students should therefore be exposed to social studies at all levels of their education to inculcate the right type of values and attitude for the protection of Nigerian democracy.

The need for social studies is apparent. This is because the knowledge of social studies would enable students to deal with social injustice, inequality, social structure, power, interest groups, and organizations and promote political participation and democratic culture. It is therefore recommended that social studies should be made compulsory at all levels of education. If this is done, social studies could bring about development of individuals that will function in a democratic society and provide education experience for students as participating democratic citizenry.

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