POLITICAL EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA: BUILDING FOUNDATIONS FOR STRONG DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH THE EXTERNAL WORLD

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ABSTRACT
This article examines the role of political education in fostering sustainable democracy in Nigeria and its significant impact on diplomatic relations with the external world. The link between political education and democracy is a matter of great concern for researchers because of the growing need for the realization of sustainable democracy in developing nations. The role that political education could play in the development of citizens in different democratic societies cannot be over emphasised, because education influences people's understanding of democracy and thus contributes greatly to the stability of democratic regimes and diplomatic relations. This paper argues that political education can deepen and strengthen knowledge and awareness on democracy among citizens in Nigeria. The paper further argues that political education is a foundational instrument for cultivating civic awareness, reducing anti-democratic behaviour, and enhancing Nigeria's credibility in global affairs. The research adopts a qualitative approach and relied on secondary source of information from scholarly literature and policy documents. Policy recommendations are offered to integrate political education more deeply into Nigeria's formal and informal educational structures.

Introduction

Education in its various dimensions ranging from formal, non-formal, to informal, is understood to be fundamental to the establishment and formation of a citizenry which recognises and values the importance of participatory engagement in the process of governance. Democracy thrives when citizens are well informed and empowered to participate in governance. In Nigeria, political education has the potential to play a transformative role in consolidating democracy and shaping the nation's diplomatic posture. Since the transition to civilian rule in 1999, Nigeria has had several electoral reforms, governance challenges, and shifting foreign policy priorities. It has become very obvious that the wide gaps in civic literacy, political awareness, and institutional capacity hinder the full realization of democratic ideals.

The quality of a nation's diplomacy is often a reflection of its internal governance systems. A stable, transparent, and participatory democracy gives a positive image abroad and facilitates smooth engagement with other states. This study explores how enhancing political education can strengthen Nigeria's democracy and, in turn, improve its diplomatic relationships with the global community and institutions of government that would be relevant to particular societal arrangements. Political education is the notion that, beyond any direct political possibilities and interactions that might be attributed to it, it should also represent some means of what the Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire (2000) would call platforms of social conscientisation. This would entail not only a more enhanced and more active public political space, but also a critical and proactive understanding of how the citizens see the state and how they relate with the state and her political institutions. From the foregoing therefore, there is a relationship between education and democracy. Good education is a prerequisite for national development and a catalyst for sustainable democracy and foundation for dynamic foreign policy. Democratic process in Nigeria has been generally characterized by anti-democratic behaviours such as political thurgery, political assassination electoral violence, ballot box snatching and stuffing, manipulation of electoral results and processes amongst others. This situation has often time undermine democratic government thereby leading to development crisis and weak diplomatic relations. Ozor (2009) noted that the faults in Nigeria democratic process could be located in the absence of democratic culture as a result of the long years of military rule. In his words, the military rule with its inherent lack of respect for democratic ideals has bastardised every aspect of Nigerian society. He noted that the current investment mentality and the zero-sum nature of governance in Nigeria is a characteristic of military institutions that has enveloped Nigeria's democracy.

This situation in his words can only be ameliorated with a radical reconstruction of not only Nigeria's government institution, but also in the attitude and behaviours of both the citizens and the political elite. It is against this backdrop, that the paper examines the place of political education in sustaining Nigeria's democracy. This study employs a qualitative research method. Data were collected from secondary sources such as peer-reviewed journal articles, government policy documents, international organization reports, and credible media publications. Thematic content analysis was used to analyse recurring patterns relating to political education, democratic sustainability, and foreign policy initiatives. The choice of a qualitative approach is justified by the study's focus on conceptual linkages rather than statistical measurements.

Theoretical Framework

This study anchored Political Socialization Theory which posits that individuals acquire political attitudes, values, and behaviours through social interaction, education, media exposure, and institutional engagement. Political socialization theory emphasizes that early exposure to civic values strengthens democratic resilience (Oshiogwemo, 2024). In Nigeria's context, political education serves as a vital mechanism for political socialization, fostering informed citizens who can participate meaningfully in governance.

Conceptualizing Education for Democracy and Democratic Education

Existing scholarship underscores the role of political education in deepening democratic culture. According to Abdulghani (2008), education for democracy refers to the form of education that describes the processes,

structures and contents of learning in institutions with the purpose of spreading democratic awareness while democratic education involves the dissemination of concepts and practices that result in integrated democratic awareness essentially through public institutions. Democratic education is concerned with the articulation of specific content and knowledge on democratic awareness, enriching what people believe and have established on democracy, improving people's perception regarding democracy and their relationship to the political system and institutions of governance for instance, with the legislature, executive and legal systems (Abdulghani, 2008). When this concept is applied in the process of teaching and learning, the citizens will be able to acquire knowledge which will enable them to understand how they should relate with political objects, issues and events around them, in order to adjust their behaviour accordingly to realize democratic purposes and good governance (Cowan,2006)).

Democratic education is therefore more of critical rather than passive learning. When properly developed in learning institutions in Nigeria, it may be useful in laying the framework for shaping political cultures as a core basis and an integral part of the shared culture of society. For a fragile and transitional democracy like Nigeria, this process should be focused at producing a democratic culture based on principles that extol values such as human and public freedoms, and social justice apart from teaching. Public freedom is concerned with human and civil rights and the right to political participation. It also reaffirms social justice by advocating for principles of universal adult suffrage to achieve democratic purposes of equal 'citizenship' and faith in rule of law (Birch, 2001).

According to Omotola (2021), civic literacy is a key determinant of political participation in emerging democracies. In Nigeria, political education is inconsistently implemented across educational institutions, resulting in knowledge gaps that weaken the electorate's ability to hold leaders accountable (Akinola, 2020). Comparative studies from Ghana, South Africa, and Kenya reveal that robust civic education initiatives can significantly enhance democratic resilience (Mensah & Boakye, 2022). Furthermore, research on democracy and diplomacy suggests that countries with strong democratic institutions tend to command greater diplomatic respect (Ikem, 2023). In Nigeria's case, domestic governance challenges such as electoral malpractice, corruption, and policy inconsistency undermine its credibility in the global arena.

Education and Individual in the Society:

The individual in the society according to Deaver (2006) is an intellectual entity. It could be seen like that rather than being seeing as a social economic or even political individual. Thus, the intellectual freedom of the individual deserves special attention and recognition to enhance political freedom and liberation. In this situation, individualism connotes having one's own purpose, peculiar problem, doing one's own thinking and displaying originality in actions. The individual is free when he is capable of carrying out his plans in the absence of obstacles, capable of changing his course of actions, and capable of experiencing new things, which is an essential element of freedom. The harmonizing agent of the individual and the society is education which plays an important role in creating a conducive relationship between the individuals and the society. According to Deaver (2006), the heart of the sociality of man is in education, the freedom of man lies in education which makes it possible to traverse the dualism of the individual and the society to arrive at a continuum. Specifically, education is necessary for the individual to express his freedom intelligently and with foresight; to organize and interact with his environment and it helps to free individual capacity in a progressive growth.

It is important to point out that it is the right type of education which is the democratic type that is needed because other type of education will not guarantee the individual freedom is automatically assured. The individual, society and education are inseparable because, society develops individual through education and individual contributes to the social, political, economic, spiritual and cultural development of the society. For a successful democratic society to be achieved, democratic education is needed which is an antidote to political crisis and realisation of dynamic foreign policy.

The importance and Roles of Education in Promoting Democratic Values:

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. lyewarun (2009) 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, Mezieobi, Domike and Osakwe (2006) notes that the emphasis placed on the goals of education ranges from culture to culture and society to society. To them, 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 (2006) 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. Metzeobi (2000), Ezegbe (2003), Obike (2003) and Osakwe (2003) 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 education has always served as a major channel for inculcating in its members independence, self-reliance, responsibility and moral uprightness. 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.

Nigerian nationhood and democracy is under threat as a result of inter-ethnic and religious clashes, education can be used to foster much needed unity for the survival of the nation.

Benefits of Political 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 (2006) opines that it is necessary to provide Nigerians with the type of education that is characterized by Nigerian culture. Defining political education in terms of human rights and civic responsibilities, it 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 political education to have a strong democratic values base, to make specific reference to citizen's rights and address issues related to diversity and the rights of minorities within society. A comprehensive political education takes account of citizenship, and considers that democracy is not only connected with human rights, but on the sustenance of democratic values as a whole. Conversely, political 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.

Political education has been used in many countries like the United States of America for solving political problems. Awosolu (2003), notes that this type of education can be used to prepare members of plural societies. Omare (1999), states that political education trains the mind of people in the direction of what is required for a stable and enduring democracy. Political education analyses man in all aspects of environments. It considers social, economic, political, religious, cultural and technological aspects of life. The teaching of political education enables learners to think beyond their individual and ethnic interests; thereby making them to tolerate and respect the views of others. It is Political education that will enhance unity and stability and human right. According to Yusuf (2005), political 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 (2003) 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.

Political education can be used to produce effective citizenship which is a basic requirement of a strong and united nation; lyewarun (2009)

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.

Obike (2003) notes that political 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, political education could bring about understanding of other ethnic groups in our society. UNESCO (2005) also advocates a political 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. Political 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. Political education enhances civic consciousness, reduces voter apathy, and promotes accountability (Oladipo, 2018; Ogbe & Ojie, 2020) Studies also reveal that ICT integration in political education has amplified youth engagement, particularly during recent electoral cycles (Idowu et al., 2025). However, gaps persist in policy implementation, curriculum design, and institutional capacity, limiting the transformative potential of political education in Nigeria.

Education and Democratic Sustainability in Nigeria:

The value of education is underlined by the fact that each society establishes an educational system designed to serve its present and future. The transmission of knowledge and values which the educational institutions impact, are those of the larger society and the morality of the school is a reflection of that society in which the school is a part. The value of education as a social institution is therefore incontrovertible and is second to none. It is undoubted fact that education is a catalyst for change. Nigeria had failed to organize a credible, free and fair election. Every election year has always been problematic. The role of education in resolving these democratic anomalies becomes imperative. Nigeria had not been able to develop a viable, popular and genuinely democratic polity.

The colonial education bequeathed to the nation was aimed at training exploiters, oppressors, cheaters and election riggers. As matter of fact, education as an institution is primarily a means designed to serve the ends of society, the ultimate end in this connection being national development for how long should we continue to talk of Nigeria being a developing or underdeveloped nation after five decades of independence? The education should be able to mobilize the citizenry politically, socially and even technologically.

Education as an agent of change has not been able to change many Nigerians politically to understand the nature of democracy as it is being practiced in other developed countries of the world. Nigeria's political education remains fragmented and underfunded, with curricula that often lack practical engagement components. Civic education in schools is frequently treated as a peripheral subject, while adult civic learning opportunities are scarce. Sustainable democracy in Nigeria is hampered by low voter turnout, limited civic activism, and public mistrust in electoral institutions. These weaknesses directly affect Nigeria's diplomatic posture, as domestic political instability can erode foreign partners' confidence. Countries with robust democratic systems are better positioned to negotiate trade, security, and development agreements from a position of strength.

There is obvious interconnectedness between domestic governance and foreign diplomacy. Political education is not merely a tool for fostering domestic civic engagement; it is also a strategic asset in international relations. A politically literate citizenry is more likely to demand transparency, uphold democratic norms, and support policies that align with the national interest. From a diplomatic standpoint, sustained democratic governance enhances Nigeria's soft power, making it a more attractive partner for bilateral and multilateral engagements. Conversely, domestic democratic deficits can tarnish the nation's reputation and weaken its negotiating position. Political education directly influences the stability of democratic institutions by fostering informed citizenship. In Nigeria, political illiteracy has often resulted in electoral violence, political manipulation, and governance deficits. Conversely, countries with higher civic literacy tend to exhibit stronger democratic resilience and international credibility. On the diplomatic front, a politically educated populace strengthens national bargaining power by ensuring coherent foreign policy positions and stable governance environments.

Conclusion

Political education remains a strategic instrument for cultivating sustainable democracy in Nigeria. By equipping citizens with the necessary civic competencies, the nation can rely on its democratic institutions and project a credible image at the international level. As Nigeria struggles with the inherent challenges of the 21st century, adopting political education into the national development strategies will be very necessary for both domestic cohesion and global diplomatic relevance. Education that aims at the total development of man has a significant role to play in his political life. To liberate man from political bondage, education remains an important instrument of change.

To harness the full potential of political education, Nigeria should adopt the following recommendations.

i. Civic Education curriculum should be included into all levels of Nigeria's educational system from the primary to the tertiary with focus on practical democratic engagement skills. These types of education would make everybody to know the implications of whatever he is doing as far as electoral processes are concern. Furthermore, it will make election rigging, falsification of figures political thuggery highly immoral and criminal.

ii. The different Democratic organs and institutions such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should be reform to build public trust and legitimacy.

iii. The type of political education to be established in Nigeria should align with the type of democracy that is indigenous to Nigeria.

iv. Government should institutionalize civic training within public service and diplomatic corps and invest in Political Literacy for Diplomats to ensure Nigeria's foreign representatives are equipped with proper democratic principles.

v. Expand digital political literacy campaigns that will target the young ones and rural populations. This will help the citizens to always know the right thing to do at the right time, know the right person and party to vote for in an election so as to cultivate and develop the culture of free and fair election which is an element of a good democratic process.

vi. The advocacy for political and civic education should be encouraged by way of partnerships between government, civil society, and academic institutions for civic engagement.

7. Government should use legislative backing to encourage the use of social and media platforms to promote political education. This will help to give information on the success of democratic diplomatic relations between Nigeria and the global community.

vii. Public Awareness Campaigns on the importance of democratic participation in electoral processes should be instituted by government.

This will make every citizen to be aware of the political activities within and outside their environment.

viii. Political education curriculum should be planned to align with Foreign Policy objectives and Democratic values to enhance credibility in international relations.

ix. Everybody in the society has to be trained to be acquainted with democratic values which include freedom of association, participation in the formation and activities of political parties, freedom of speech and press.

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