

Philosophy of Education and Democratic Ideals in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

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This paper discusses philosophy of education and democratic ideals in Nigeria. Philosophy of education as applied philosophy analyses the theoretical findings of democratic ideals and translates them into workable schemes for the process of democracy. Generally, democratic ideals imply collective leadership, collective responsibility and equality of opportunities. The paper discusses democracy and democratic ideals, philosophy of education and democratic ideals in Nigeria, challenges of democratic ideals in Nigeria, strategies for realising democratic ideals in Nigeria. The paper recommends among other things constitutional reforms to ensure respect for human rights and rule of law.

Keywords:

Philosophy, Education, Democratic ideals, Law

INTRODUCTION

One of the five cardinal objectives for the Nigerian nation is to build “a free and democratic society. A society, hopefully, will enable people to interact among themselves, act within the dictates of their conscience and make laws that will govern them.

Generally, democratic ideals imply collective leadership, collective responsibility and equality of opportunities. The above rests on the following which embrace an outline of democratic ideals.

- i. The worth and dignity of the individual as a human being should be acknowledged. Every person should be able to achieve a creative and viable individuality.
- ii. Everyone should have the capacity to learn how to act. He or she has or can develop sufficient capacity to manage his or her life with others through conscious and planned actions.
- iii. A person who must abide by decisions should have a part in making them. Collective decisions become crucial to democracy. The interest of the governed should be protected.

iv. The control and direction of democratic actions lies within the situation and not outside it. People in a situation struggle to improve it.

v. The process of living is the interactive process. Each individual works with every other individual by sharing and evaluating individual experiences and agreeing upon the most fruitful ways of achieving desired common goals (FGN,2013).

This presupposes that freedom for consultation, collective decisions, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and the like should exist in a democratic society. There should be interdependence amongst the constituent elements in a society to ensure coherence and orderliness as well as accomplishment of societal aspirations. In other words, no single individual or institution should be considered as the be all and end all in a society. Thus, mutual trust, co-operation interdependence, intelligent interaction tends to characterize the democratic process.

Democracy requires a decision-making system based on majority rule with minority rights protected. Effective guarantee of freedom of speech, press, religion, assembly, and equality before the law are indispensable to a democratic ideal of a government. Politics, parties, and politicians are the catalytic agents which make democratic ideals workable.

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Hence, it becomes clear that military rule does not qualify for democratic government. In Nigeria, however, various military governments have tried to bring some aspects of democracy in their process of governance. For example, some public functionaries were required to account for their activities while in office. Some forms of equal access to education through scholarship and the education were given to citizens. (Bell and Dayle, 2002).

DEMOCRACY AND DEMOCRATIC IDEALS

Democracy simply means rule by the people. The term is derived from the Greek word, *demos* meaning 'people' and *kratos*, meaning 'ruling power'. Democracy therefore may be defined as a system of government where people exercise power of governance through representatives, popularly and periodically elected by the people themselves. It may mean as well the system of government whereby the people exercise their governmental power either directly or indirectly through representatives elected by them periodically. This means that in democracy, power belongs to the people and the head of state symbolized the head of the people and the people's government. It is a government which is derived from public opinion and is accountable to the people (Anene, 2005).

According to Abraham Lincoln, "democracy is the government of the people by the people and for the people". Democracy is a form of representative government in which the people elect those who represent their various interests in different aspects of governance. Democracy can be categorized into two types namely direct and representative. Direct type of democracy is one in which all the citizens meet to take part in decision making in order to govern the society. Direct democracy has been rare because of difficulties of getting all the people of a certain territory in one place for voting purpose.

Indirect or representative democracy is that in which all the citizens through election elect those who will represent and govern the state on their behalf. In representative politics, citizens elect people to make political decisions, formulate laws and administer programmes for the public good. (Ojo, 2005)

Democratic ideals involve the rule by the people based on some principles and processes and these include the following:

- i. **Popular Consensus:** Before any major decision is taken in a liberal democracy, the consent of the people must be sought. This is done through debates in legislative houses and through debates in the mass media. The mass media serve as effective channels of communication between people and the representative's government.
- ii. **Rule of Law and Constitutional Government:** The rule of law is an important aspect of the democratic process. Government by law, rather than by men is a basic principle of democracy.

Disregard for law is a disruption of effective functioning of democracy. In democratic ideal, government business must be established according to law.

- iii. **Periodic Election:** There is a fixed period of time for elected representatives in a democratic ideal government. This means that Intervally- elections must be conducted. In Nigeria, elections are normally conducted every four years at states and federal level.
- iv. **Protection of Human Rights:** In democratic countries, it is quite essential to protect human Rights: In essence, the fundamental human rights including freedom of thought and expression, freedom of religions, freedom of assembly and association. These are essential to democratic ideals.
- v. **Political Party Competition:** In a good democratic process, there must be two or more political parties to compete regularly by putting candidates up for government offices. The existence of more than one political party is to give the electorate wide range of choices on those to be elected as well as prevention of imposition of a dictator on the people of a country.
- vi. **Judiciary Independence:** There must be an independent judiciary for the full protection of citizens' rights. The judges of different courts are to be appointed by merit and cannot be removed, except on gross misconduct. Therefore, within the ambit of the law, they are expected to administer justice without fear or favour.
- vii. **Majority Rule and Minority Rights:** Under the democratic dispensations, citizens freely make political decisions by majority rule. Majority rules and minority will have its say, and this is why in a democratic ideal, great deal of compromise is reached and when this is not achieved the contending views are put to vote and the decision with majority vote will carry the day.
- viii. **Accountability:** Public accountability is fundamental to democratic ideals. By this, those who exercise political power must be answerable to the people, if the elected officials do not follow democratic ideals, then the electorate will not vote them into power again in the next election or they can resort to the process of recall (Anene,2005).

Philosophy of Education and Democratic Ideals in Nigeria

Philosophy of education as applied philosophy analyses the theoretical findings of democratic ideals and translates them into workable schemes for the process of democracy. Generally, democratic ideals imply collective leadership, collective responsibility and equality

opportunities. These democratic ideals cannot be imbibed meaningful by citizens without adequate educational machinery. The different agencies of education: the family (home), the church, the community, the mass media, the state, should be galvanized to propagate the democratic ideals. The home serves a very important educational function, particularly in child upbringing. It necessarily follows that the child is given some freedom, responsibility and conducive atmosphere to function. Parental authoritarianism should be eschewed.

Education for democracy should be emphasized in application of democratic ideals in all our activities. This cuts across the homes, schools and governments. It is a strong mark of educational attainment and correspondingly civilization for a society to attain political and economic stability. Such stability in a democratic state, cannot be achieved without educated citizens.

The school should be encouraged in the development of individual capabilities. The worth and dignity of the individual should be accorded some regard. Teachers should, therefore, recognize the existence of individual variability and orient instruction accordingly.

For democracy to exist in practice, such features as individualism, liberty, equality and fraternity should be present. As Okafor (2020) puts it: Democracy contains the ingredients necessary for emancipation of the emergent man from the grip of fear by extending the boundaries of liberty to help him make the best possible use of his life. It creates a society where citizens have equal access to the opportunities, rewards and benefits of the social environment.

Equality of educational opportunity, suggests giving similar or the same type of educational treatment to everybody without disabilities or barriers the individuals may have.

The multi-dimensional concept of equally educational opportunity makes further analysis very necessary. Thus, Dewey (2007) opined that equality of educational opportunity has the following elements:

- i. Equal access to education
- ii. Equal educational treatment; and
- iii. Equality of educational outcome.

Briefly explained, equal access to education would suggest that school fees, facilities available, Curricula content and implementation, quality of staff are equally accessible to all involved. Equal educational treatment is related to the above but more specific provided according to capability and disabilities. Resources and services provided have equal spread amongst the schools in a given country. Equality of educational outcome does suggest that public expectations of school products within the same operation level should be alike. In other words, given equal access and equal educational treatment, school products of a given secondary school should have comparable performance with the products of another secondary school.

Certain provisions in the National policy on Education for Nigeria (2013) tend to suggest equally of educational opportunity objective. For example, some of the national objectives which form the basis for the national education policy include the building of

- (i) a just and equalitarian society;
- (ii) a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens.

Consequent upon the above objectives, Nigeria's philosophy of education "is based on the integration of the individual into a sound and effective citizen and equal educational opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

Consistent with the above philosophy, there is further provision for equality of educational opportunity in the policy. Thus, on special education it states:

The purpose and objectives of special education should be

- (a) To give concrete meaning to the idea of equalizing educational opportunities for all children, their physical, mental, emotional disabilities notwithstanding;
- (b) To provide adequate education for all handicapped children and adults in order that they fully play their roles in the development of the nation;
- (c) To provide opportunities for exceptionally gifted children to develop at their own pace in the interest of the nation's economic and technological development.

The above provisions and imply the followings

- (a) Individuals have rights to education to the limits of their respective capacities.
- (b) Financial predicament is no barrier to one's right and access- to education.
- (c) No form of disabilities should prevent one from having the access and right to education.
- (d) The individual's social status should not be a barrier to his educational pursuit.
- (e) Individuals have the right to acquire education anywhere within the country as long as they have the capacity and qualifications to do so.
- (f) Nobody should prevent any Nigerian from having access to education (FGN, 2013)

Challenges of Democratic Ideals in Nigeria

Democracy in Nigeria has been bedeviled by numerous problems, which include.

Leadership Challenges

Nigeria's fundamental approach to leadership is troubling. In Nigeria, the primary goal of assuming leadership position is self-enrichment. Nigerian leaders have the power to educate, inspire and provide for the people but they have failed in their responsibilities to lead by good examples. In the problem with Nigeria, Chinua Achebe concludes that Nigeria's problem is bad leadership and evidence on the ground has consistently shown that he is correct. Certainly, it

is leaders and not the poor rural dwellers that are responsible for Nigeria's underdevelopment.

In every country, it is the responsibility of the leadership to protect the political, social and economic interest of the citizens. Leading a country involves making policies and finding solutions to problems, ensuring stability of the polity and guiding 'the society to prosperity. Large number of the political leaders of Nigeria lack the vision, the passion and the character to effectively govern the state and deal with the crumbling economy.

They do not have a clear understanding of their responsibilities, and some of them are insensitive to the people's suffering. Nigerians are tired of complaining to those who are leading without listening to them. As Ojo (2005) opines "leaders can point to many reasons why they aren't good listeners, but none of these reasons excuses them from the obligation to listen". Leaders who listen are however known to respond well to criticisms and crisis, build more loyalty and increase the morale of the people. Listening is a way of showing that a leader cares about others.

Due to the fact that power belongs to the people, no political leaders in the advanced democracies would function effectively without the support of the people. Thus, they constantly have their ears on the ground for information which guides them in policy formulations and implementations. The world's leading democracies are what they are today because their leaders are innovative and always searching for solutions to their social, political and economic problems. This is not the case with Nigeria, where evidence of bad leadership is all over the landscape as the leaders have not gone beyond a promise for change. (Azinge, 2004)

Corruption

The greater democratic challenge facing Nigeria is "corruption". Corruption has been defined as act of "requesting, offering, giving or accepting directly or indirectly a bribe or any other undue advantage or the prospect thereof, which distorts the proper performance of any duty or behavior required of the recipient of the bribe, the undue advantage of the prospect thereof" (Adekola, 2010)).

As corruption has become the dominant social norm on the first four decades of political independence, no doubt indicates that citizens themselves are instrumental to the national decay. However, they are receptive to corrupt friendly regimes, thus celebrating the potent force of mal-governance and underdevelopment. Unfortunately, after many years of independence, Nigerians still harbor the mentality that public money belongs to no one and that any person who has access to it, should convert it into his or her personal use. Corruption permeates every sector of the Nigerian society.

However, the most disturbing and damaging form of corruption made manifest in the succession of despotic governments, which have produced extremely wealthy generals and political leaders. (Ojo, 2005).

Human Rights Violation

Prior to the return to civilian rule in May 1999. the human-rights situation in Nigeria was very poor. At present, fundamental rights of citizens still come under attack despite the advent of democracy. For instance, the protection and enjoyment of the rights to life and respect for human dignity is hampered by the non-availability of the necessary socio-economic infrastructures that can guarantee the realization and fulfillment of such rights. (Adekola, 2010)

According to a report on Human Rights, the traditional means by which the Nigeria rights to life and respect for human dignity was abused. Extra judicial killings including assassinations, arbitrary arrests and detention, disappearances, avoidable disaster and. the poor administration of our prison system.

Extra-judicial killings have also increased in the land against one of the twin pillars of natural justice, which requires that a person must be heard before any punitive measure can be taken against him. The Nigerian police and the numerous ethnic militant groups in Nigeria took unenviable lead in the killings and brutalities that took place across Nigeria. The truth in most case is that the rights of Nigerians (many of them mere suspects) were violated.

Police and military taskforce brutality have also increased and the rights of innocent Nigerians are trampled upon whether in their homes, highways, offices or public places. Although the military has gone back to the barracks for well over fifteen years the human rights situation has not really improved. It still presents the recurrent anomalies of extra judicial killings, arbitrary arrest and detention without trial, torture and degrading treatment, which are perpetually perpetrated on a daily basis. (Ola, 2019)

Election Irregularities

In the contemporary world of today, elections have become the most acceptable means of changing leadership in any given political system. At all times, it is the conduct of a free and fair electoral process that justifies a representative government to be referred to as democracy because the authority of government is derived solely from the consent of the governed.

In Nigeria, the general elections, especially the 2003 and 2007 elections were reported to be marred by irregularities by foreign and local observers. In fact, most of the results of the 2007 general elections were reversed by the judiciary, while many are still pending. The integrity of the electoral system is a major issue facing democratic ideals in Nigeria. It is known from past history that turbulent elections have been a source of political crisis in Nigeria and controversies surrounding elections have serious potential to undermine the legitimacy and stability of democracy. There could be the most serious consequences for democratic development if political leaders are unable to reach consensus on rules of political conduct, and if the Nigerian public

therefore becomes alienated from the electoral process. (Okafor, 2020).

Strategies for Realizing democratic Ideals

It is widely acknowledged that democratic ideals are required for successful development efforts and economic prosperity of a country. To promote democratic ideals in Nigeria, the focus should primarily be on institutional and administrative

reforms that include: judicial reforms to bring an independent and effective system of judiciary; constitutional reforms to ensure states foundations and structures respect human rights and rule of law; administrative decentralization at the grassroots level to promote democratic structures encouraging the development of a free and independent media, and measures to prevent fraud, corruption and favoritism and strengthening civil society. The political process must be inclusive in which people are able to raise their concerns and participate in the overall decision-making process. Every state must identify the areas of weakness and then work out the strategies accordingly under the guidelines provided. (Oyedele, 2018)

There is a dire need to establish performance-based criteria regarding: the delivery of public goods and services. It is a fairly established fact that parliaments are the ultimate source to force the governments to remain transparent in dealing with the people of their countries. They ought to prove their ability to serve the people better by strengthening government accountability through active parliamentary committees, improving parliamentary research and information services and increasing media coverage of proceedings. Parliamentarians on their parts must exercise the legislative powers with greater responsibility.

To enhance accountability and transparency, laws need to be made to ensure that all parliamentarians have declared their financial and criminal antecedents. These declarations must be accessible to all. They are supposed to play their role in holding the executive accountable for its policies and actions by raising questions. The details of the question must be made public. To make the system more participatory, citizens should be allowed to attend the parliamentary discussions except in extraordinary situations. In democratic societies the media is one of the strong instruments in promoting transparency. (Okafor, 2020)

The civil society is using the access to information to expose corruption and secure the rights of the poor. However, the excessive misuse of the freedom by some sections of the media in assassinating the character of political leaders or public servants without evidence may damage the cause of transparency and accountability (Adekola 2010). The media is required to play a more responsible role by doing its homework before highlighting any report or information.

The judiciary can be progressive by enforcing high penalties to mitigate corruption within the courts and by

educating people about their rights under the law. The law must be clear and accessible to all and must protect fundamental human rights.

Ministries and public officers must exercise the power conferred on them in good faith. Nigeria has accomplished the task of separating the judiciary from the executive, though there are numerous challenges ahead. A large-scale induction of judges and court personnel required to make justice available to all within a short period of time.

In this regard, efforts must be made to address the widespread judicial corruption. In the words of Azinge (2004) Nigeria should develop a system of regular monitoring, inspection and evaluation of courts.

There is an urgent need for an accountable, transparent and efficient police service that ensures the safety and wellbeing of the citizens. They need regular training for getting equipped with the modern techniques to face present day challenges. It will enhance the professional competence of police. In order to bring accountability in the system and to minimize external influence, an independent commission needs to be established to oversee police functioning. It supports building confidence in the police and ensures that the police are accountable before the law and nation it serves.

In community policing, law-enforcement agency, the police and the law-abiding citizens should work together to prevent crime, arrest offenders, solve ongoing problems and improve the overall quality of life (Okafor, 2020). The objective behind this idea is to minimize the gap between police and citizens through ensuring community participation in policing. The federal governments need to take the matter serious and strengthen community policing to ensure that the initiative makes its contribution to democratic ideals.

Finally, democracy blossoms better under a peaceful environment. All political office holders, particularly the ruling party should imbibe the spirit of accepting opposing views. Opposition should also learn the spirit of giving constructive and objective criticism to the policies and programmes of the ruling party. The three arms of government- legislative, executive and judiciary should be fully independent.

This will enable proper execution of the principles of checks and balances. Thus, it will reduce to a large extent, the discretionary use of executive powers and abuse of the constitution. It is advised 'that all politicians, the electoral commission, law enforcement agencies, all other government bodies and private individuals should dispense their responsibilities within the societal laws and accepted traditions towards the achievement of a sustainable democracy (Okafor,2020).

CONCLUSION

Democracy has been attested by many scholars in social sciences as the ideal and best system of government that allows maximum participation of the populace in the government: This is why the world government (UNO)

encourages every country of the world to be democratic and consolidate it in order to realize a sustainable national development. Thus, the democratic ideals must be in place for this development. However, if Nigeria is able to tackle a number of challenges to her nascent democracy and institute a sound administration and governance, based on democratic ideals, there is undoubtedly hope for an accelerated national development.

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