

Civic Education and Leadership: The Nexus in Good Governance



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ABSTRACT: This research examined civic education and leadership: the nexus in good governance. The research focused on the leadership crises being experienced in many countries, states, communities, institutions, and even churches, in the world today. The leadership impasse is more predominant in third-world countries. This study provided elucidation of concepts of civic education and leadership, investigated the relationship between civic education and leadership, the impact of civic education on leadership traits, the nexible role of civic education and good leadership in good governance. It revealed that the leadership crises at different strata, levels and contexts are a function of absence of civic education in schools. It contended that civic education is the only solution to varying leadership challenges, especially in Africa and Nigeria. In order to give credence to our arguments, the research used the functional theory of leadership which argues that the essence of leadership is to provide necessities and needs of a group, and that a leader is acknowledged as having done his job well only when he has contributed to the group's effectiveness and cohesion. The researcher recommended, among others, conscious efforts to inculcate in young students/children the value of civic responsibilities which breeds good leadership and good governance.

KEY WORDS: Civic Education, Leadership, Leadership crises, Nexus and Good Governance.

INTRODUCTION

The world today is considered a global village in the sense of interconnectivity in all aspects of human endeavours; not only in sharing of information, ideas, philosophies, religions and cultural values but also in the diplomatic ties and transfer of leadership ingenuities and skills. Civic education is the vehicle for the inevitable transfer of leadership facilities. Leadership dexterity proceeds from civic education which makes for good governance. The dividends of good governance bring about habitable society, a society devoid of crises but characterized by peace and tranquility, orderliness and decency, and their attendant socio-economic development.

The global village phenomenon and the expected socio-economic advancement are, however, heavily threatened by ravaging circumstantial leadership crises. The embarrassing leadership imbroglio stems from near (if not total) absence of civic education. The disappearance of civic education and its attendant impacts is traceable to the failure of government to pay genuine attention in the area of functional civic education; the failure of religious organizations (churches) in teaching and practicing morality; the failure of parents in discharging their core parental responsibilities and the failure of the society in emphasizing and ensuring dedicated practice of social values.

Concepts of Civic Education and Leadership

The concept of Civic Education comprises two important components — “Civic” and “Education”. The term, *Civic* is “the study of rights and duties of citizens and how government works” (Noah, 2005). *Education* connotes “a process of teaching, training and learning, especially in schools and colleges, to improve knowledge and develop skills” (Hornby, 2006). *Civic Education*, therefore, is the process of studying how man (citizen) could become a good, disciplined, effective and quality citizen in the society. It is a kind of education that provides students with a rich knowledge and understanding of their responsibilities as citizens. Civic education is a vital aspect of education that cultivates in citizens the sense of participating in the public life of a government and democracy, to use their rights and to discharge their responsibilities with the necessary knowledge and skills. Edward (2011) contended that civic education means “all the processes that affect peoples’ beliefs, commitments, capabilities and actions as members or prospective members of communities”. Civic education, thus, is not only acquired through formal education but also via informal education and other forms of socialization; its primary essence being to produce quality future citizenship that would participate in group decision making, negotiation and social life of positive consequence. In democracy, civic education is education in self government. Self government implies that citizens are actively involved in their own governance; hence they do not indifferently accept the assertions and declarations of others or, consciously or unconsciously consent to the demands of others.

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Leadership, as a concept, although largely talked about, is one of the concepts that is least understood of all social phenomena across cultures and civilization (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). We can, however, refer to some scholarly conceptualization. Anorue (2018) conceived leadership as “the process by which the superior influences the behavior of its subordinate”. It is “the ability to motivate and to integrate followers to achieve determined organizational goals” (Akpala, 1990). It entails a strategic method by which a leader impressively affects the attitudes and the will of the subordinates for the primary essence of achieving designated objectives of an organization. The attitude so affected through leadership helps the members of such organization, community, state or country does things that ordinarily they would not have done. Essentially, leadership defines the activity of guiding, directing, coordinating and controlling the actions of other people, showing them what to do and the way to go at a given time. Ignacimuthu (2001) gave simple but oriental definition of leadership as “a means of setting an example”. Achebe (1983) like Ignacimuthu further gave utilitarian definition as “ability of leaders to rise to the responsibility and challenge of personal example”.

In politics, leadership is seen as possessing power over others. Leadership is certainly a form of power, not isolated from power over people, rather it is a power with people that exists as a reciprocal relationship between a leader and his/her followers (Forsyth, 200). The use of power here does not imply unnecessary use of manipulation, coercion and domination to influence others but dispositional characteristics like intelligence, ingenuity, proactiveness and self-sacrifice that enables a leader to exert systematic authority in actualizing set goals. It is power defined by patriotism, that is, “an emotion of love directed by critical intelligence” (Achebe, 1983). In Christianity, the conception and practice of leadership is conceived in the framework of servanthship. Christian thinking of leadership often emphasizes stewardship of divinely provided resources — human and material — and their deployment in accordance with a divine plane (Greenleaf, 2002; Ajaero, 2014).

Relationship between Civic Education and Leadership

The interest in and concern about character education and education for citizenship are not new in curriculum development in many countries of the world, especially Africa countries. The two have always gone together. In the United States of America, for instance, the basic reason for establishing and expanding public schooling was to foster those traits of public and private character necessary for experiment in self government (Elam, 1995). Similar reason to the above informed the earlier introduction of Civic Education in Nigeria’s educational system in 1950s-1970s and an emphatic reintroduction as compulsory subject for primary and secondary schools in 2005. The objectives of civic education, among others, as expounded by Onwumere (2012) are to:

Prepare the younger ones for good leadership and followership; inculcate in the students the values, cultures, ideas, ethics, knowledge... which help them live as one in spite of... differences; inculcate in the students the sense of patriotism, statesmanship, philanthropy, tolerance and other national ethics and values....

Character and civic virtue are important public matters needed for leadership at any level. They are primarily acquired via civic education. Essentially, schools —primary, secondary and tertiary— were and are still expected to induce pupils, students and undergraduates to act virtuously. Acting virtuously means more specifically that one should act with due restraint over his/her impulses, due regard for the rights and opinions of others, and reasonable concern for the probable and the long consequences of one’s actions. This is the hallmark of leadership.

The fact is that the ethos or culture of a given school and of the classroom exerts powerful influences on what students learn about authority, responsibility, justice, civility and respect. The dynamic by which individuals acquire desired traits of private and public character is through exposure to attractive model of behaviour enshrined in the objectives of civic education. Achebe’s and Ignacimuthu’s definitions of leadership as setting examples are espoused by Coles (1997) as he described the dynamic of character acquisition:

Character is ultimately who we are expressed in our action, in how we live, in what we do – and so the children around us know, they absorb and take stock of what they observe, namely us – we adults living and doing in a certain spirit, getting on with one another in our various ways. Our children add up, imitate, file away what they have observed and so very often later fall in line with particular moral counsel we unwittingly or quite unself-consciously have offered them....

Character, especially that of leadership trait, does not come pre-packaged. Character formation is a lengthy and complex process streamlined in civic education. Although Wilson (1991) asserted that “we do not know how character is formed in any scientifically rigorous sense”, yet, researches and observations have shown that the study of traditional secondary school subject such as literature, government, civic education and history, when properly taught, provide the necessary framework for character education. More importantly, the afore mentioned traditional school subjects provide a context for considering the traits of public and private character which are vital to leadership as well as essential to the maintenance and improvement of democratic way of life. The practice of leadership has enormous implication for the relationship between leadership and citizenship. In democracies, leadership is best understood as a dimension of citizenship itself, distinctive only in that it involves special competencies. The inseparability of civic education from leadership is further seen in its impact.

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Impact of Civic Education on Leadership Traits

It is truism that traits of private character such as moral responsibility, self-discipline and respect for individual worth and human dignity are essential to its well-being. Also, traits of public character such as public-spiritedness, civility, respect for law, critical mindedness, and a willingness to negotiate and compromise are indispensable to a continued success of any given country that wish unparalleled development. Both private and public traits coalesce into the totality of human behaviour that constitutes composite leadership traits. Leadership traits no doubt proceed from quality civic education.

The critical question is: how can civic education strengthen and complement the development of character, that is, leadership traits? We agree that primary responsibility for the cultivation of ethical behaviour and the development of private character, including moral character, lies with families, religious institutions, work settings and other parts of civic society. However, schools can and should play a vital role in the overall development of the character of students, especially leadership traits. Thus, effective civic education programmes and curriculum contents are expected to provide students with many opportunities for the development of desirable traits of public and private character. Many character traits needed to participate effectively in leadership are learnt and promoted in civic education classes. Leadership traits like civility, courage, self-discipline, persistence, concern for the common good, respect for others and other traits relevant to citizenship are promoted through cooperative learning activities and in civic education class meetings, student councils, simulated public hearings, mock trials, mock elections and student courts. Other leadership traits such as punctuality, personal responsibility, recognition of shared values and a sense of community are fostered in schools.

It means, in nutshell, that civic education has a wide range impact on leadership traits. Leadership is a matter of intelligence, trustworthiness, humaneness, courage and discipline. All these traits find bearing in the study of the issues and topics on civic education. However, Sun Tzu in a leadership principle book edited by Leslie Pockell and Adrienne Avila (2007) asserted as a warning and an advice:

Reliance on intelligence alone results in rebelliousness. Exercise of humaneness results in weakness. Fixation on trust results in folly. Dependence on the strength of courage results in violence. Excessive discipline and sternness in command result in cruelty. When one has all five virtues together, each appropriate to its function, then, one can be a better leader.

The caution is absolutely necessary. In as much as the five virtues define composite quality traits of leadership impacted through functional civic education, it is imperative to moderate unnecessary excessiveness.

Nexible Role of Civic Education to Good Leadership and Desirable Governance

It is quintessential that the participatory skills of leadership start in the earliest stages of studentship and continues throughout the course of schooling. The youngest pupils can learn, through civic education, to interact in small groups or committees, to pool information, exchange opinions or formulate plans of action commensurate with their maturity. Also, they can learn to listen attentively, to question effectively and to manage conflicts through mediation, compromise or consensus-building.

Civic education in a democratic society more assuredly is concerned with promoting understanding of the ideals of democracy and a reasoned commitment to the values and principles of democracy which makes for good leadership and governance. Democracy is not utopian and civic education plays the role of helping the students to understand that, and more importantly removes in them cynicism, apathetism, and tendencies of withdrawal from political life. The prime concern of civic education is the development of an informed, effective and responsible citizenry. Democracies are sustained by citizens who have the requisite knowledge, skills and dispositions. Absence of the above and a reasoned commitment on the part of citizens to the fundamental values and principles of democracy, a free and open society cannot succeed. An average citizen, especially African citizen like Nigerian, want a society and a government in which human rights are respected, individual's dignity and worth are acknowledged, rule of law is observed, people willingly fulfill their responsibilities and common good is the concern of all. Civic education provides ingredients of all these. Civic education, as a matter of fact, instigates a question, what is civic life, politics and government? The answers and consideration of the question promote greater understanding of the nature and importance of civic society or the complex network of freely formed, voluntary political, social and economic associations which is an essential component of a constitutional democracy.

Functional civic education, in broader perspective, provides genuine understanding of the historical, philosophical and economic foundation of global political system, (African and Nigerian political system in particular); political cultures and the values and principles basic to conventional constitutional democracy. The political culture and values include individual rights and responsibilities, concern for the public good, the rule of law, justice, equality, diversity, truth, patriotism, federalism and the separation of powers. Awareness of all these and the concerted efforts to put them into practice amounts to intellectual skills. Intellectual skills in civic and government are factually inseparable in content. To be able, therefore, to think critically about a political issue, and to deal squarely with the issue, for instance, one needs to have an understanding of the issue, its history and its contemporary relevance.

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A utilitarian civic education enables an intending leader of any sort to identify and give meaning to tangible national realities such as the flag, national monuments, civic and political events. In the same vein, it empowers one to give significance to intangibles such as ideas or concepts including patriotism, nationalism, statesmanship, majority and minority rights, civic society and constitutionalism. Another intellectual skill which practical civic education fosters is the ability to describe functions and processes of government and governance such as legislative checks and balances or judicial reviews. It also seeks to develop in citizens the competencies of analyzing and explaining the structure of government for good governance. If citizens can critically interpret and explicate how something should work; for instance, federal system, legal system, or system of checks and balances, they will be more able to detect and help correct malfunctions. Citizens also need to be able to illuminate and expound such things as components and consequences of ideas, social, political or economic processes and institutions. The skill to analyze, gotten from useful civic education, enables one to distinguish between facts and opinion or between means and ends. More importantly, it enables citizens to clarify between personal and public responsibilities, and responsibilities of those elected or appointed. The skills also help intending leaders in evaluating, taking and defending decisions and positions. All the intellectual skills supplied by utilitarian civic education are translated into good leadership and governance.

Civic Education as a Solution to Challenges of Leadership in Nigeria

There is no gainsaying the fact that challenges of leadership has, for a reckoned time, bedeviled Africa at large and Nigeria in particular. Challenges of leadership have impacted gravely and negatively on the social, religious, economic and political lives of the people. Increased ethnic chauvinism, inter and intra tribal clashes, militancy, Boko Haram insurgency, farmers-herdmen clashes, political jingoism and prebendalism, economic recession, institutional deviance, to mention but a few, are consequential offshoots of failure of leadership. Allan (2015) listed seven challenges against which African leaders have failed as: “the policy of rewarding friends and punishing foes, nepotism, blurred vision, competition for preeminence, corruption, dictatorship and failure to redefine goals”. Each of these challenges has its own short and long term effects on the African federalism and sovereignty, as well as on the citizens.

In spite of the grave impacts of challenges of leadership in Africa, the hope of African countries and their citizens lies in the integration, appropriation and implementation of civic education in schools at different levels. We have expatiated in our earlier discussions on the relationship, impacts and role of civic education in good leadership and governance. Each of the leadership challenges listed by Allan (2015) above has a topic in civic education meant to handle it from the cradle of studentship. For instance, the problem of the policy of rewarding friends and punishing foes, corruption and nepotism are adequately covered in the curriculum content of Junior Secondary School 1-2 under the headings of our values, citizenship, social issues, rights and rules of law. Subtopics and discussions on our values, for instance, condemn the policy of rewarding friends and punishing foes, corruption and nepotism, but advocates the practice of honesty, cooperation, self reliance and integrity. Topic such as citizenship espouses the meaning of rights, duties and obligations of citizens as well as meaning of federation, federalism and leadership. A further cursory examination of curriculum contents of civic education for senior secondary school and tertiary education shows that all aspects of leadership deficiencies in Africa and Nigeria are captured in those curricula. What seems to be absent is the exploration of the utilitarian aspect of the curricula which need to be done by seasoned, dedicated, selfless and patriotic tutors, teachers and lecturers. Civic education can, thus, be a solution if it is properly thought in schools and concerted efforts made to get the students and pupils practice the basic contents of the subject.

CONCLUSION

Civic education and leadership are indeed integral. Their nexus and intricate connectivity, if genuinely explored, would guarantee good governance. Good governance has been the clamour of African citizens for some time now. Bad governance has been the clog in the wheel of African developmental strives. Hopes are not, however, lost in the face of emerging clamour and reintroduction of civic education in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. At least, it is the first step to ensuring the inculcation of right attitude and actual conceptualization of citizenship and the need for responsible leadership translatable into good governance. Beyond the reintroduction of civic education, there should be a collective will to experiment the utilitarian impact of civic education on leadership and good governance if we must have Nigeria of our aggregated dream.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Owing to leadership challenges and their consequences on governance in Nigeria, the time is ripe for nationwide initiatives that could promote increased citizenship interest, understanding and participation in local, state and federal government, as well as civic association, processes and purposes of civic society and leadership. Thus, we recommend as follow:

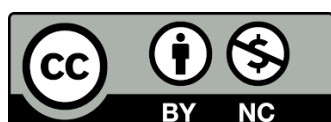
1. There should be a national initiative to revitalize civic education to make it more utilitarian. The national initiative championed by the federal government should focus on the importance of civic education for every child which will provide grounding in the rights and responsibilities of citizens. Such an initiative would increase civic literacy, foster civility among citizens, promote understanding and appreciation of democratic institutions and processes, and enhance sense of political efficiency.

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2. Federal, state and local governments should be more attentive to the professional development needs of tutors, teachers and lecturers. More academically qualified, patriotic and dedicated educators should be employed to handle civic education as a subject in schools in order to achieve policy objectives of the subject/course.
3. The importance, role and impact of civic education on leadership and good governance should always be communicated to pupils, students, undergraduates and the general public through televised public forum, print media and television announcements. Parents, civic leaders and the media are important influences and have significant contributions to make in civic education. Their support should, therefore, be solicited.
4. Federal and state legislatures, board of education and schools should reexamine the formal curricula of civic education and their assessment practices to determine the adequacy and effectiveness of their education programmes. They should take appropriate action to strengthen the formal curricula and their assessment practices.
5. Attempts should be made by teachers and lecturers to integrate students and undergraduates in the governance of their classrooms and schools. Classrooms and schools should be considered laboratories in which students can employ participatory skills commensurate with their maturity. They should learn to effectively, as well as learn how to monitor and influence school and public policies. Through this way, the students would develop a reasoned commitment to those fundamental values and principles necessary for the preservation and improvement of leadership skills and rules of governance.

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