

THE FUNCTION OF POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE AND EDUCATION IN ATTAINING DEMOCRATIC FREEDOM IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The knowledge of politics and its contributions to the proper and effective practice of democracy cannot be over emphasized. The challenges facing the adherence to the tenets of democracy in Nigeria are numerous, one of which has been identified as the high rate of illiteracy when it comes to political education in the country. The agenda setting theory was adopted for this research work. This paper has been able to identify the function of political education in attaining democratic freedom in Nigeria. It has also been able to identify the challenges of and solutions to such issues hindering the success of democratic liberty in Nigeria. Having figured out the challenges, it has recommended access to high level of literacy as a first step through awareness

Introduction:

Education means a lot of different things to different people. Put simply education is “the totality of learning activities that occur in formal, non-formal, and informal contexts”. It “exists in all societies in different forms and contents, as individuals and groups move through their life stages.” Thabo Mbeki (1999). One may also suggest that a great part of what education is lies in what it does. Indeed, one has only to observe the transformative power of education in the life of an individual and on society as

of its significance to human capacity development and then political knowledge through political education among others as solutions to these problems. The research was carried out using primary source of data.

Keywords: *Political Knowledge, Function, Education, Democratic, Freedom.*

a whole to understand the depth of its purpose. Education allows the mind of an individual to grasp ideas and concepts. It instils values and principles that aid in the development of one's physical, mental, and social well-being. It is through the education process that individuals develop the ability to learn, to think, and to reason. Individuals are therefore, equipped with the tools to build self-confidence, to become self-sufficient, and to develop critical perspectives. Furthermore, through education, citizens acquire the skills and competencies to become productive members of society and learn about their societies' values and its political culture.

From the point of view of states and governments, this "transforming" effect of education "is premised on the idea that [formal] education will provide the catalyst for economic, social, and political development" of both the individual and society. While education entails more than the ability to read and write, it is widely accepted that literacy is a fundamental prerequisite for modernization since the more literate the population of a country, the better the chances for the development of those institutions which are found in all advanced modern societies.

The relationship between education and democracy can be seen in many areas. In keeping with the "modernizing" concept education is seen to promote democracy "because it leads to prosperity, which in turn produces the development of core values such as self-autonomy, independence of thought, and the right to self-determination." (Finkel,2003). Through this enlightened process the individual presumably gains a liberal outlook on life which "enables [him] to understand the need for norms of tolerance" and cooperation and the intelligence to resist "extremist and monistic

doctrines. (Boadi,2003). Therefore, this educated class promotes a “culture of democracy”; they are more politically engaged and have the “confidence to resist oppressive rule and the skills for fighting repression, including the language for articulating opposition to repression and demanding self-government. Furthermore, it is through the “culture” of the politically informed that political institutions derive legitimacy, thereby sustaining democratic systems.

The process of educating citizens on the consciousness of politics and its tenets is called political education. This involves teaching individuals to have respect for the rule of law, the need for active participation in politics directly or indirectly, free and fair election, respect for fundamental human rights, equality and justice for all and building of democratic institutions. It is paramount to create democratic awareness on the part of citizens and its representatives on the need to strengthen democratic institutions as that is the only means the liberty of citizens can be protected and respected in a democracy and democratically.

(Ekuri, K. A; Betiang, P & Andong, H. A) in “The Role of Political Education in Promoting and Sustaining Democracy in Nigeria” mentioned that Ogugbemi, & Egberase (2010) are of the view that the ingredients of democracy have not flourished after several years of political independence in Nigeria. Aboribo & Akpovona (2007) affirms that the Nigerian political space reveals failure in the practice of democracy because of the role of its state in the economy and in the process of class formation. They emphasized that the practice of democracy in Nigeria only favours the interest of the dominant class. On this note, Political Education therefore becomes imperative in impacting democratic knowledge, skills and values on people to be able to address the aforementioned challenges facing Nigeria. This type of education will enhance and ensure that the core values of respect for the rule of law, fundamental human rights and equality and justice for all will be adhered to. All these should enhance peace, growth, development and sustainable democratic process relevant for the country. The paper examines the extent to which political education can bring about democratic freedom in the Nigeria.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Concept of Political Education

Political Education is a means of socializing the citizens of a given country to cultivate the “virtues, knowledge, and skills necessary for political participation” (Amy, 1987). Political education covers both formal education offered in school such as Civic Education, Government and Political Science; and, non-formal education offered by the National Orientation Agency (NOA), political parties, Civil Society Organizations, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), among others. A broader examination of the concept of political education reveals that it is meant to educate the masses on how to carry out their roles as citizens. (Ekuri, K. A; Betiang, P & Andong, H. A, 2012)

Olatunde and Ademola (1963) view political education as “process which makes the biological organism into a human being and gives it a life. It is through the self that biological organism can behave in ways which becomes recognizable human and which gives it a sense of identity”. This means that our personality and way of life as human beings is shaped and developed through political education.

Political education makes people aware of the activities of government and makes the government of the day popular if done in a positive manner. However, it also makes citizens conscious of their rights and as such a citizen is able to tell when government is protecting its interest or not. This should not be perceived as a negative awareness but a conscious awareness.

Osakwe (1993) highlights political education as a means of conveying to the learners the body of knowledge, set of values and behavioural orientation that are considered vital and necessary for the sustenance and wellbeing of the people. This infers that political education is a set of practices and activities geared towards making people better equipped to participate actively in democratic life, by assuming and exercising their rights and responsibilities in society. Also, Iyamu (1999) asserts that political education is a conscious effort to inculcate in a people, a set of values and attitude contingent on the need and problems of the society.

Hamad *et al* (2001) sees political education as the process in which political attitudes and behaviours are germinated and formed which, however is not limited to party politics such as voting, and electioneering campaign.

The Directorate for Social Mobilization states that political education in the Nigerian context can be described as a process of mental liberation which breaks down apathy and the culture of silence of vast majority of Nigerians and empowers them to participate effectively and meaningfully in the process of nation building. It also includes teaching the people to know their right and obligations in the society; encouraging effective participation by the people in social and political processes in societies. This infers the creation of a new national political culture that facilitates the establishment and consolidation of an integrated, enduring and viable democratic order in the Nigerian society. The manifestation of political education can be seen in the behavioural characteristics such as critical thinking, activism, inquiry, goals and values of a good political system (Omare, 1999).

In concrete terms, it aims at getting the people to take part in their government, to assume their responsibilities of contributing to the development of the society, to make them aware of their rights and defend them without fear, to harness and tap the latent forces in the people, to make them see politics as an essential aspect of the entire social fabric and to make them less vulnerable to induce influences in the political process (Azeez & Ebenezer, 2017).

The Concept of Democratic Freedom

The term democracy is derived from two Greek words 'demos' which means 'people' and kratos which means 'rule of or by'. Literally, democracy therefore means 'rule by the people' (Anifowose and Enemu, 1999). This depicts that the people themselves undertook the work of government and governed themselves directly. This is referred to as direct democracy practiced in the ancient Greek – city – state of Athens. In modern times, nations practice indirect, or modern or representative democracy,

whereby the people exercise the governing power through the elected representative periodically elected by themselves.

Lincoln (1864) defined democracy as the government of the people, by the people and for the people. Tike and Akpotor (2007) see democracy as representative government which ought theoretically to stimulate a sense of attachment to policies and programme of the state by the governed. Appadorai (2004) further described democracy as a system of government under which the people exercise the governing power either directly or through representatives periodically elected by them.

Freedom simply means liberty. It originates from the latin word “libertas” derived from the name of the goddess libertas whom along with the Goddess of liberty, usually portrays the concept, and the archaic Roman god Liber. It is the ability to do as one pleases. It is the state of being free within the society from oppressive restrictions imposed by authority on one’s way of life, behaviour or political views. Thus liberty entails the responsible use of freedom under the rule of law without depriving anyone else of their freedom.

Philosophers from earliest times have considered the question of liberty. Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius (121–180 AD) wrote: “a polity in which there is the same law for all, a polity administered with regard to equal rights and equal freedom of speech, and the idea of a kingly government which respects most of all the freedom of the governed”. According to Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679): “a free man is he that in those things which by his strength and wit he is able to do is not hindered to do what he hath the will to do”. John Locke (1632–1704) rejected that definition of liberty. While not specifically mentioning Hobbes, he attacks Sir Robert Filmer who had the same definition. According to Locke: “In the state of nature, liberty consists of being free from any superior power on Earth. People are not under the will or law-making authority of others but have only the law of nature for their rule. In political society, liberty consists of being under no other law-making power except that established by consent in the commonwealth. People are free from the dominion of any will or legal

restraint apart from that enacted by their own constituted law-making power according to the trust put in it”.

Thus, freedom is not as Sir Robert Filmer defines it: 'A liberty for everyone to do what he likes, to live as he pleases, and not to be tied by any laws.' Freedom is constrained by laws in both the state of nature and political society. Freedom of nature is to be under no other restraint but the law of nature. Freedom of people under government is to be under no restraint apart from standing rules to live by that are common to everyone in the society and made by the law-making power established in it. Persons have a right or liberty to (1) follow their own will in all things that the law has not prohibited and (2) not be subject to the inconstant, uncertain, unknown, and arbitrary wills of others. John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), in his work, *On Liberty*, was the first to recognize the difference between liberty as the freedom to act and liberty as the absence of coercion. In his book “*Two Concepts of Liberty*”, Isaiah Berlin formally framed the differences between two perspectives as the distinction between two opposite concepts of liberty: positive liberty and negative liberty. The latter designates a negative condition in which an individual is protected from tyranny and the arbitrary exercise of authority, while the former refers to the liberty that comes from self-mastery, the freedom from inner compulsions such as weakness and fear. It is worthy of note that England following the Act of Union 1707, Great Britain, laid down the cornerstones of the concept of individual liberty.

Democratic freedom can be simply termed “liberal democracy” as such one can’t describe it without talking about liberalism. Lemar Alexander Farhad in his paper titled “The relationship between liberty and Democracy” cited Zakaria, F (2013) in his essay, “A Brief History of Human Liberty,” who argues that Christianity paved the way for the concepts of liberty to become entrenched in society, and thus liberty started in the West, and came before the concept of democracy. He points out that although democracy was created in ancient Greece, the Greeks did not leave behind any viable democratic institutions to influence Europe. He partially agrees that the notion of liberty does trace its origins to Christianity. By contrast,

He contends that liberalism traces its roots back to the European Enlightenment movement, which, was anti religion and against the Roman Catholic Church. Emmanuel Kant advocated the exercise of universal peace. The European Enlightenment ideas paved the way for the French Revolution. The concept of liberty, fraternity, and equality became mainstream political thought. These concepts soon made their way into the American Constitution. Zakaria maintains that, "America's path to liberal democracy was exceptional." Woodrow Wilson was influenced by liberal beliefs long after the founding fathers. His foreign policy was heavily partial to liberalism; as Wilson himself was deeply affected by Kant's ideas. Zakaria in his essay, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," contends, liberalism is about individual rights.

Western states combined the concept of liberalism and the rule of law to develop constitutional liberalism, which holds individual rights, property rights, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, equality, separation of church and state, and government of checks and balances, almost sacrosanct. Zakaria, F (1997)

The principal purposes for which the People establish democratic government are the protection and promotion of their rights, interests, and welfare freely. Democratic liberty requires that each individual be free to participate in the political community's self-government. Thus political freedom lies at the heart of the concept of democratic liberty. The overall concept of modern democratic liberty has three principal parts: "democracy," "constitutionalism," and "liberalism."

- Democratic principle emphasizes the rule by the People through free and fair elections and other forms of participation
- Constitutionalism principle refers to the use of constitutions to limit government by law.
- Liberalism refers to freedom, equality, and dignity of the individual; Each must exist in a political system for it to be a genuine democracy. (Ekuri, K. A; Betiang, P & Andong, H. A, 2012).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory adopted for this paper is the Agenda Setting theory. The theory propounded by Max McCombs and Donald Shaw describes the ability to influence the importance placed on topics of public agenda. It is the creation of public awareness and concern of salient issues by the news media. It also describes the way the media attempts to influence viewers. The theory postulates that the importance attached to a news item by the listening/reading audience is determined by the frequency and prominence of coverage given to the news issue by the media.

The mass media remains the link between events in the world and the images of these events in the citizen's minds. In this regards, Bernard Cohen (1963,) aptly avers that: "... the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about. Lippmann (1922) argues that the mass media are the principal connection between events in the world and the images in the minds of the public. This he stated in his book titled "public opinion". Rogers, E; Dearing, J (1988) identify three types of agenda setting:

1. Public Agenda Setting, in which the public's agenda is the dependent variable (the traditional hypothesis)
2. Media Agenda Setting, in which the media's agenda is treated as the dependent variable ("agenda building")
3. Policy Agenda Setting, in which elite policy makers' agendas are treated as the dependent variable ("political agenda setting")

Agenda-setting studies typically show variability in the correlation between media and public agenda. To explain differences in the correlation, McCombs and colleagues created the concept of "need for orientation", which "describes individual differences in the desire for orienting cues and background information".

Two concepts: relevance and uncertainty, define an individual's need for orientation. Relevance suggests that an individual will not seek news media information if an issue is not personally relevant. Hence, if relevance

is low, people will feel the need for less orientation. There are many issues in our country that are just not relevant to people, because they do not affect us. Many news organizations attempt to frame issues in a way that attempts to make them relevant to its audiences. This is their way of keeping their viewership/readership high. "Level of uncertainty is the second defining condition of need for orientation. Frequently, individuals already have all the information that they desire about a topic. Their degree of uncertainty is low." (Mccombs, 2004) When issues are of high personal relevance and uncertainty low, the need to monitor any changes in those issues will be present and there will be a moderate the need for orientation. If at any point in time viewers/readers have high relevance and high uncertainty about any type of issue/event/election campaign, there was a high need for orientation.

David Weaver (1977) adapted the concept of "individual's need for orientation" defined regarding relevance and uncertainty. Research done by Weaver in 1977 suggested that individuals vary on their need for orientation. Need for orientation is a combination of the individual's interest in the topic and uncertainty about the issue. The higher levels of interest and uncertainty produce higher levels of need for orientation. So the individual would be considerably likely to be influenced by the media stories (psychological aspect of theory).

Schonbach and Weaver (1985) focused on need for orientation showed the strongest agenda-setting effects at a moderate need for orientation (under conditions of low interest and high uncertainty).

"After first-level agenda-setting effects were established, researchers began to explore a "second-level" of agenda setting that examines the influence of attribute salience, or the properties, qualities, and characteristics that describe objects or people in the news and the tone of those attributes." The second level of agenda setting was suggested after research confirmed the effects of the theory. As agenda-setting theory was being developed, scholars pointed out many attributes that describe the object. Each of the objects on an agenda has a lot of attributes containing cognitive components such as information that describes characteristics of

the object, and an affective component including tones (positive, negative, neutral) of the characteristics on agenda.

The agenda setting theory and the second level of agenda setting, framing, are both relevant and similar in demonstrating how society is influenced by media, but they describe a different process of influence. One tells us what information to process and the other tells us how to process that information. Framing theory, an extension of agenda setting, describes how the "stance" an article of media may take can affect the perception of the viewer. It is said that there are two main attributes of the second-level of agenda setting. Those include substantive and affective. The substantive factor has to do mainly with things such as personality and ideology. The affective factor is focused on the positive, negative, and neutral side of things.

According to Cobb and Elder (1971) as cited by Dlakwa (2008) in his book "concepts and models in public policy formulation and analysis" Agenda setting can be institutionalized from a systemic beginning. This was demonstrated by a simple diagram on how public policy starts from an individual problem to group problem until it becomes an institutional issue. The diagram suggests that public knowledge and awareness of political events can lead to solutions of citizens' problems. The diagram is shown below;

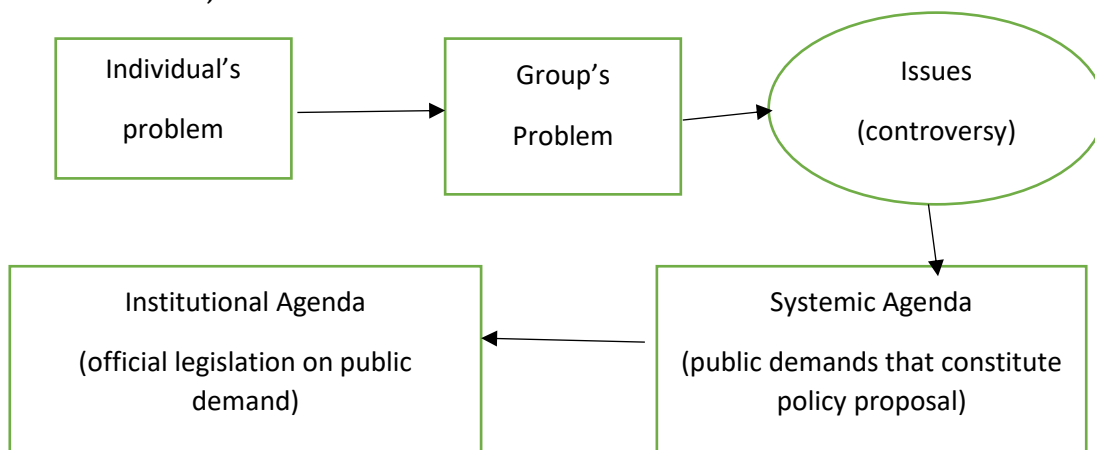


Diagram 1. Cobb and Elder's model of policy Agenda setting. Dlakwa (2008)

The diagram above shows how the consciousness of an individual can become a group problem thus leading to issues that generate debate in a system which leads to public demand such as demand for portable drinking water or electricity in a community, for instance. These demands gets to the government through their representatives (legislators) who then deliberate on it and meet the demands of the people in the institution responsible for it thus making it an institutional agenda. Political education is the only way this can be achieved, for if the citizenry is not aware of their rights and what they can influence, they can't articulate and pursue it.

THE FUNCTION OF POLITICAL EDUCATION IN ATTAINING DEMOCRATIC FREEDOM

The basic fact still remains that the essence of political education cannot be questioned when it comes to fostering the liberty of citizens in a democracy. Democracy itself has among its tenets: equality, freedom and the rule of law. For it to flourish, there must be adequate knowledge of what it stands for. This will in turn curb the issues of political apathy by citizens, misrepresentation by legislators, injustice by the judiciary and poor public service delivery by the executive. It will also articulate viable options, for accountable governance, rule of law, separation of powers, citizens' relation with the decision-making structure of the state etc.

Political education for democratic liberty refers to the fundamental process of teaching and promoting the development of democratic knowledge, skills, values or attitude necessary in a democracy. It is an educational system that has a democratic structure and follows democratic processes. Eleonora (2002) affirm that there exists a strong correlation between political education and democracy. He emphasized that a more inclusive, more widely exploratory, and more aesthetically informed political education broadens opportunities for richer experiences of a democratic life. Kaliba (2000) further points out that despite various aims of political education, it remains a democratizing force that helps people to participate actively in all aspects of democratic life.

Political education teaches the content of democratic knowledge which the people must learn. The content of civic literacy includes, learning what democracy is, the history of their societies, how societies and government are organized and how governments functions. The must also have vital knowledge of economic, political, social and legal structures and systems of how they work and function. The people are also taught about the constitutions of their countries, and universal human rights. They are made to know and understand international relations, because the world now has become a global village. They learn how democracy and democratic processes and structures are created, how democracy works and how it is sustainable. Furthermore, they are taught why societies choose democratic principles and organizations. Finally, they are taught that in democracy, everyone's voice must be listened to, that decisions are made by the majority vote, and that the rights of the majority must be respected and protected. (Ekuri, K. A; Betiang, P & Andong, H. A, 2012)

Furthermore, political education also enhances democracy by teaching democratic skills which the people must acquire to participate maximally in society. These democratic skills taught ensures that the people must know how to read and write; know how to engage in true dialogue and processes of conflict resolution, management and negotiation. Thus, they are taught how to engage constructively in discussions of controversial public issues. The people also learn how to cooperate, think critically and independently, know how to access pros and cons of alternative solutions to problems.

Through the teaching and learning of democratic values or attitudes, political education also promotes democracy in Nigeria. These democratic values include integrity, self-discipline, responsibility, respect and tolerance, justice, freedom and human rights among others. These are not innate values and therefore must be taught thoroughly as democratic knowledge and skills are taught. The essence of teaching democratic values is anchored on the fact that, democracy is founded on specific values that must be explicitly labelled, identified, practiced and promoted in group-settings, not just in the family, so that people learn that values are not just

private and personal choices, but also choices that have public and social consequences (Eleonora: 2000).

The apparent ignorance in political education among Nigerians has affected people's attitudes towards government policies and programs. It has also influenced wrong attitude and perception generally towards people from different parts of the country. This wrong perception has been formed by people and this has not augured well for the much desired unity and political stability in the country.

Despite the teachings of politics at all levels of education in Nigeria, no significant impact has been made in the political consciousness has been made. This is because our democratic system is some sort of democracy that only God knows what to call it. I won't be wrong if I term it dictatorial democracy. Why is it so? It is so because even with the knowledge, any attempt to protest any inappropriate action of government by the citizenry is faced with fierce and coercive action by government. A simple example is the most recent "Revolutionist" attempt by Omoyele Sowore which ended up getting him locked up and labelled a terrorist.

Another paramount issue is the educating process itself. The education system is so decade that unqualified teachers are employed on the basis of "who know who" and as such can't explain to the students in clear terms what their rights are. This makes it difficult for students from the secondary school level to be able to inculcate that knowledge of not having fear to approach a situation where their rights are trampled upon within the ambits of the law. Recently, a Swedish child of 16 years (Greta Thunberg) led a protest on climate change globally. Thunberg can do this freely because there is democratic liberty in the country he is from which he has used to carry out global action. This is as a result of political consciousness which is as a result of political education. The lack of this gives us the opposite for instance the practice of political thuggery is encouraged persistently by Nigerian politicians. They take undue advantage of the low political knowledge of the youths in politics and encourage them to kill innocent citizens and destroy properties by giving them money. Politicians believe that they must manipulate the electoral

process to win at election and this is usually done through employing the youths.

CONCLUSION

This paper analysed the functions of political knowledge and education in attaining democratic freedom in Nigeria. The Agenda Setting theory was adopted as the theoretical framework. The theory discussed the need for awareness through orientation of the citizenry and how through these awareness, a systemic agenda can become an institutional agenda. The paper also examined the concepts of political education and democratic freedom where it established the meaning and essence of political education. It further was able to differentiate and also link democracy and freedom stating clearly that freedom is a fundamental part of democracy. It has also seen how political education can increase citizens' consciousness through exercising their rights freely which they have known through political education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are suggested for the proper and effective attainment of political education in Nigeria:

- i. The first thing to do to correct this is to upgrade our educational system. The quality of education is becoming something else. The likes of the Kaduna state governor, Dr. Nasiru Elrufai attempted to do that in his state and it's sad that some Nigerians saw it as a bad course of action. There should also be high literacy rate amongst Nigerians. More of the nation's budget should be channelled to education.
- ii. Subjects such as citizenship education should have political conscious teachers to teach them. Meaning that the teacher teaching such should not only have the knowledge but should be up to date with the environment of politics of the state or country. A standard curriculum should be designed for this

purpose The choice of citizenship education is because it is a general subject offered by all.

- iii. The study of the constitution should be encouraged by introducing a new subject at secondary school levels which can be called “constitutional studies”. This will help in imbibing the knowledge of the rules governing the land to the average Nigerian from a young age. The truth is we as Nigerians are lazy readers and as such picking up a copy of the constitution to read is a tedious task, besides who likes rules?
- iv. The constitution should also be available, easily accessible and affordable to the average Nigerian citizen.
- v. The educated elites should also play the role of educating the electorate on democracy and liberty. It is rather unfortunate that for selfish reasons they don't do that or rather do it negatively to insight citizens against government for the protection of their economic or political interest.
- vi. The media and other institutions such as the National Orientation Agency have a very significant role to play. They should enlighten citizens on their rights, duties and obligations. The media should also be able to stand for citizens who are not afraid to voice out that become victims of negative government actions.

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