



## Civic Education Curriculum Implementation: Pathway to the Realisation of True Federalism in Nigeria

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### Abstract

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With recourse to the unique geographic and ethnographic composition of Nigeria, the federal system of government was adopted for the most important British colonial possession in West Africa in 1954 through the adoption of the Littleton Constitution. However, the practice of federalism in Nigeria today has left more to be desired. The concern of the paper was therefore to examine the practice of federalism in Nigeria – the defining features of Nigerian federalism and how it differs from the ideal or true federalism. The paper also reviewed the components of civic education considered to be useful in the entrenchment of federalist ideals and principles in the Nigerian school child. The paper went further to recommend the practical approach needed to bring true federalism to reality in Nigeria. It is the considered position of these authors that the clamour for true federalism in Nigeria can be effectuated through effective implementation of the civic education curriculum in Nigerian schools.

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### **Background to the Study**

In every political entity characterised by diverse ethnic or cultural diversities, and where some ethnic constituents are considerably larger than others, there is the unavoidable fear of domination of the minority by the majority group. This statement is a true reflection of what Nigeria is. Nigeria, by all standards, is a large country geographically and ethnographically. With a land mass of 123,768 km<sup>2</sup> and over 250 ethnic nationalities numbering over 160 million people, the foregoing cannot be more apt and the rationale for the adoption of a federal system of government cannot be more justified. Federalism was adopted for Nigeria in 1954 by the Littleton constitution. After then, with the passing time, a number of defects became evident in the practice of federalism in Nigerian.

According to Ukoima (2015), one thing is clear in a federal system of government, the tiers of government ought to share political power as expressly spelt out in the constitution. Unfortunately, the current foundation and principles on which Nigerian constitution is operated over the years particularly since the advent of democracy has not in any way reflected a true federalism in its practical sense. The author stated further that presently, Nigeria has a strong centre and weak states. The states have become administrative units of the federal government. The relationship between the centre and the states still reflects the military command structure, an unwelcome legacy of the military administration. The states are so weak that none of them enjoys fiscal independence from the centre. The federal government pays the piper and is happily dictating the tune to the states. The states are so weak and so generally impoverished that they have no capacity even to negotiate meaningfully with the centre. None of the states as it is now can generate enough internal revenue to prosecute any appreciable social and economic development. Instead of pillars, the states have become a burden on the federation.

This anomaly is being blamed on poor intellectual foundation of the ruling class. It is the considered opinion of the current authors that if the Nigerian child is well oriented towards national consciousness; he would grow to become an altruistic, patriotic and selfless advocate of national wellbeing. Such a politically socialised citizen would be armed with all the requisite skills for effective citizenship. He would find the slightest aberration from the norm most abhorrent. Such a citizen would insist on the implementation of international best practices in the political affairs of his country in the areas of democratic principles and system of government like federalism. Adeniran (1991) in Ijalaye (2001) quipped that events of the recent past have indicated that Nigeria is facing the threat of losing its much cherished sense of nationhood and political culture.

Against this backdrop, civic education has been viewed as the potent pathway to achieving true federalism in Nigeria. According to Agu (2009), the drive towards re-engineering the process of teaching and learning civic education in our primary and secondary schools has become very imperative especially in the face of dwindling levels of national consciousness, social harmony and patriotic zeal. In his view, as far back as the 1980s, it became painfully evident that the lack of civic education and patriotic orientation had led to disorientation in schools and the larger society. The consequences were being felt at all strata of our society. This was why Political Bureau set up by former President

Ibrahim Babangida recommended, in March 1987, the establishment of a Directorate for Social Mobilisation (MAMSER) which eventually transformed into the National Orientation Agency (NOA).

Viewed from the perspective of orientation, it must be noted that the best time to give orientation to an individual is during the formative age. Accordingly, national orientation should be given to children in their school years. The core subject, whose curriculum is designed to give primary and secondary school pupils and students respectively the knowledge, skill and orientation needed for national consciousness is civic education. The crux of this paper therefore is the analysis of the place of civic education curriculum implementation in the realisation of true federalism in Nigeria.

### **Conceptualising Civic Education**

The concept of civic education has been given varied definition largely based on individual vintage points. However, they all point to one and the same thing. To Jekayinfa, Mofoluwawo & Oladiran (nd), civic education is an important means of teaching the populace about individual rights and what duties and responsibilities the governed and leaders should do. According to the author, the re-introduction of Civic Education as a subject to be taught in primary and secondary schools in Nigeria is expected to further deepen democratic culture and encourage qualitative participation of the average Nigerian in the governance process. The prevalence of trend of corruption, indiscipline, disrespect for both elders and the rule of law, indifference to duty are clear examples of the manifestations of negative trends in the Nigerian society. There is therefore need for urgent value re-orientation because of their far reaching impact on national development. To do these, the school has a great role to play.

### **Civic Education in Nigerian School Curriculum**

In view of the flagrant apathy exhibited by most Nigerian citizens to political matters, as well as various anti-social behaviours that are inimical to the socio-political cum economic wellbeing of the federation, the need for the introduction of civic education became apparent. Nigerian media and press are awash with news of corruption, fraud, electoral malpractice and sundry issues of indignity. If the future generation are not rightly skewed in thinking and action, their generation may be worse than the current one hence, the need for a body of knowledge that will orient them to be in harmony with national ideals. The subject is civic education, separate from social studies. This is in addition to the National Orientation Agency. According to Jekayinfa *et al* (nd), the introduction of the subject is designed to refocus, re-invigorate and reposition our great country to further realize her full potentials as envisaged by our founding fathers. Specifically, civic education seeks to expose our pupils and students to the tenets and rudiments of citizenship education. It is envisaged that the teaching of the subject in our schools will lay a strong foundation for effective citizenship education and public participation in governance and other ethical issues that affect our lives.

Azebamwan (2010) noted that as a subject, Civic Education helps people to deal with the world around them in a more capable and confident way. It covers a wide range of issues, topics and legislation that impact on people's lives and daily living at all time and these are areas that are covered under Civic Education. The subject teaches young people how to get the best out of their world. It teaches them to stand up for their rights and opinions and how to help other people to do so. It teaches tolerance of opposing viewpoints and that there is no such thing as "the right answer". It teaches them to recognise their responsibilities to the government, other individuals and the environment. It covers areas of life like voting, taxes, the justice system, prisons, other peoples and their cultures, international relations, etc. Civic education has the good aims and purposes. It is the education which aims to help people learn how to become active, informed and responsible citizens. More specifically, it aims to prepare them for life as citizens of a democracy. Different characteristics are required by citizens in different types of political systems. The characteristics required of people living as free and equal citizens in a democratic society differ significantly from those of people living under a totalitarian or communist regime. In a democratic setting, citizens should be aware of their rights and responsibilities as citizens; informed about the social and political world; concerned about the welfare of others; articulate in their opinions and arguments; capable of having an influence on the world; active in their communities; and responsible in how they act as citizens.

Azebanwan (2010) also opined that the curriculum content of civic education could cover but should not be limited to: The concept of Nationhood; Democracy; The process of government; Types of government; Different arms of government and the balance of power; Unity in diversity; Dealing with conflict; The legal system; Security; Political Parties and the elective process; The role of the Legislature; Devolution of Powers; Pressure Groups and Sectional Interests; Child Labour ; The Media and Public Opinion; Human Rights; Local Government; Crime and Society; Young People and the Law; Freedom of Speech; and The comity of nation states and the place and role of Nigeria in it. Civic Education focuses on topical everyday issues that concern young people as citizens - that is, as members of society with legal rights and responsibilities, e.g. education, health, public transport, policing and law enforcement, immigration, international relations and the environment.

### **Components of Civic Education**

As a body of knowledge, civic education is designed on a structure based on the needs of the Nigerian child reflecting the national ideals and values the children are expected to acquire. The components of civic education in the Nigerian school system include civic knowledge, civic skills and civic disposition (Branson, 1998).

### **Civic Knowledge**

Knowledge of the ideals, values, and principles set forth in the nation's core documents serves an additional and useful purpose. Those ideals, values, and principles are criteria which citizens can use to judge the means and ends of government, as well as the means and ends of the myriad groups that are part of civil society. In Nigeria, values such as

respect, dignity of labour, obedience, justice, equity and fairness. These values are necessary in the entrenchment of federal principles on the minds of the young ones. Accordingly, the knowledge of these national values and ideals are curricular contents of the Nigerian civic education in both primary and secondary schools in the country.

### **Civic Skills: Intellectual and Participatory**

The second essential component of civic education in a democratic society such as Nigeria is civic skills. If citizens are to exercise their rights and discharge their responsibilities as members of self-governing communities, they do not only need to acquire a body of knowledge such as that embodied in the five organising questions just described; they also need to acquire relevant intellectual and participatory skills. Intellectual skills in civics and government are inseparable from content. To be able to think critically about a political issue, for example, one must have an understanding of the issue, its history, its contemporary relevance, as well as command of a set of intellectual tools or considerations useful in dealing with such an issue. Another intellectual skill which good civic education fosters is that of describing. The ability to describe functions and processes such as legislative checks and balances or judicial review is indicative of understanding. The question of federalism requires intellectual skills to be able to evaluate and analyse and question its practice.

### **Civic Dispositions: Essential Traits of Private and Public Character**

The third essential component of civic education, civic dispositions, refers to the traits of private and public character essential to the maintenance and improvement of federalism. Civic dispositions, like civic skills, develop slowly over time and as a result of what one learns and experiences in the home, school, community, and organizations of civil society. Those experiences should engender understanding that democracy requires the responsible self governance of each individual; one cannot exist without the other. Traits of private character such as moral responsibility, self discipline, and respect for the worth and human dignity of every individual are imperative. Traits of public character are no less consequential. Such traits as public spiritedness, civility, respect for the rule of law, critical mindedness, and willingness to listen, negotiate, and compromise are indispensable to democracy's success.

### **The Concept of Federalism**

Federalism as a concept is etymologically derived from the Latin word “federe”, which means “to trust” or “to entrust” some agreed values to a central entity of a given country (Udenwa, 2005). From this etymological root, the definition of federalism came to be a “process of formation of a particular kind of political union, with at least two autonomous but interdependent levels of government” (Jackson & Stein, 2006). This definition sees federalism as political process that involves the coming together of different autonomous geopolitical entities to form a more formidable national entity severing certain powers to a central authority to administer the entire federation. In the view of Odion (2011), as a system of government, federalism allows for the division of sovereignty between the central government and the federating units. The management of this dual sovereignty makes federalism a complex political option. Thus the two levels of government-the

federal and state are independent and coordinates. Basically, federalism is the system of government that constitutionally allows for the sharing of powers of state among the different components or federating units. The federating unit bear different names in different countries. For instance, some countries use regions or province while others use state. Therefore, power is shared between the central/federal government and the state government and its subcomponent – local government. In the constitution of a federal state, political powers and jurisdiction of influence are shared among the various tiers by means of exclusive list (central government), concurrent list (central and state) and residual list (local government). An ideal or a true federal system in practice allows adequate power or autonomy to the states in relation to the central government. In other words, the power of the central government must be limited to certain areas in the exclusive list like foreign affairs, military/security, immigration and excise duties. Good examples of true federal states across the globe include the United States of America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Switzerland, India, Pakistan, Brazil, Indonesia and Russia.

### **Federalism: The Nigerian Experience**

As noted in the introductory section of this paper, the federal system as envisaged and practiced by those who introduced it before and during the first republic differ from what obtains now. The political and economic power of the federal government in Nigeria far overwhelms that of the states. This is more glaring in the allocation of federally generated revenue. For instance, Lukpata (2013) observed that revenue sharing formula in the federation by far favours the government at the centre. According to the author, in the last few years, the percentage allocation to the central government has been between 48% and 55% compared to 25% - 35% and 10% - 20% allocated to the state and local government respectively. Consequent upon this, the question of whether Nigeria practices true federalism arose. Ukoima (2015) identified the core components of federalism and relates it to the practice in Nigeria thereby bringing to the fore Nigeria's deviation from the true framework of the system.

### **Military Security – Centralized Responsibility of the Central Government**

It is the responsibility of the central government to provide security and protection for the rest of the units and the citizenry. In Nigeria, it is a common practice for the President to use his emergency powers to deploy the military at his whims. Military deployment could only be applicable in times of war or appropriate state of emergency with the approval of the House. However, cases of arbitrary use of force and unilateral declaration of state of emergencies abound in Nigeria.

### **Economic Benefits & Efficiency – Cooperative function of the Central and its Subunits**

In Nigeria, the central government believes and operates on the basis that the federal government owns the country, its resources and all that dwell in the land. The central takes the fund that rightly belongs to the state and local governments into the coffers of the Federal Government. The subunits are thereby denied the wherewithal to carry out their functions for the progress and welfare of their citizens. Nigerian states have almost completely lost their autonomy. The centralization and concentration of the country's

revenues in the hands of the central government has resulted in the country's poor political, social and economic development.

### **Innovation – Decentralized Sphere of the Subunits**

Federalism enables a people to try experiments which could not safely be tried in a large centralized country. In a single state, if its citizens choose, she could serve as a laboratory; and try novel social and economic experiments without risk to the rest of the country. When states share goals but try different policies, the potential for policy decentralization to stimulate beneficial innovation is maximized. Under the current federal government in Nigeria, all power is centralized, and the states do not have any control over their resources, hence there is no incentive for innovation and states competition. Nigeria's economic development, political stability, security and peace depend on extending the freedom, benefits and choice of autonomy to each ethnic nationality within the country.

### **Intergovernmental Competition – Decentralized Subunits Authority**

Governments compete with one another to the benefit of their citizens, eliminating waste and encouraging growth. Intergovernmental competition directly strengthens the allocative functions of government. Decentralization permits governments to match services with variations in demand. Greater overall citizen satisfaction can be achieved with multiple governments offering different packages of public services at different prices. Competition forces governments to become more efficient in their allocative activities, providing better services at lower costs. Competition forces government to be more responsive to citizens' preferences than monopoly government. Allocation is the function that local governments can perform more effectively than central governments, because decentralization allows for a closer match between the supply of public services and their variable demand. Citizens migrate to those communities where the allocation best matches their demand curve.

### **Market Preservation - Cooperative Sphere between the Central Government and its subunits**

A market requires firmly established and credibly defended property rights. Uniform governmental regulation can establish rules governing property ownership and transfer, as well as provide a forum to adjudicate disputes. However, in order to prevent government encroachments on property rights, decentralization and fragmented authority enable a state to credibly commit not to expropriate all rents, when couple with other conditions, such as a decentralization of fiscal control and hard budget constraints. In Nigeria the commitment to establishing property rights and effective markets has not been accompanied with significant devolution of power to sub national governments. There is no triumphal market economy due to lack of freedom of local governments to set their economic policies and induce competition among jurisdictions.

### **Accountability – Decentralized Subunits Exclusivity**

Representation and accountability go hand-in-hand: elected leaders are more likely to represent their constituents faithfully when they know they are held accountable for their

actions. Accountability is impossible without transparent responsibility. Therefore, it is claimed that authority decentralization improves accountability because citizens are more likely to see the effects of government action at the local level and respond accordingly in the ballot box. Nigerian citizens face a key challenge in holding their political representatives accountable, since decentralization reforms tend to be partial in nature, leading to the involvement of multiple tiers of government in the provision of public goods.

### **Anti-Tyranny and Rights - Cooperative between central government and its subunits**

Federalism's inherent fragmentation is well-suited to block tyranny; when decision-making power is subdivided, the tyrant cannot easily gain full control. It is a common practice in Nigeria that the ruling class could abuse its powers to oppress the governed just as easily as a king. The minority groups such as women, children and the less privileged are faced with the dangers of tyranny of their rulers. Centralization of power and majority's tyranny over political and social minorities is "a constant threat" to Nigerian democracy.

### **Forced Compliance**

Sometimes the federal government justifies its encroachments on states non-compliance, even when the subject of compliance is unconstitutional or too expensive for the state to implement. Very often, the federal government uses intergovernmental retaliation to enforce compliance. Intergovernmental Retaliation is a severe type of safeguard. It is a safeguard with potentially disastrous effects. It can lead to Civil war.

### **The Place of Civic Education in the Realisation of true Federalism in Nigerian**

Civic education could be found very instrumental to the effectuation of true federalism in Nigeria if the pedagogical, instructional and curriculum requirements are in good stead. Branson (1998) opined that what citizens need to sustain political culture is to have requisite knowledge, skills and disposition. Specifically, the curriculum of civic education must contain the formal and informal components of learning. The formal curriculum instruction in civic education provides a basic and realistic understanding of civic life, politics, and government. It familiarises students with the national constitutions and the edicts and byelaws of the state in which they live, because these and other core documents are criteria which can be used to judge the means and ends of government. Formal instruction should enable citizens to understand the workings of their own and other political systems, as well as the relationship of the politics and government of their own country to world affairs.

On the other hand, there is the informal curriculum requirement of civic education instruction, which encompasses the governance of the school community and the relationships among those within it, as well as the co-curricular activities that a school provides. Classroom and schools should be managed by adults who govern in accord with democratic values and principles - which are the core of a federal system - and who display traits of character, private and public, that are worthy of emulation. Students also should be held accountable for behaving in accord with fair and reasonable standards and



for respecting the rights and dignity of others, including their peers. Respecting the rights and dignity of other elements or components is the ruling spirit of federalism. If the central government does not regard the lower tiers of government, then true federalism would naturally be a fiasco. The need to inculcate this spirit in the children from the secondary school level, therefore cannot be over-emphasised to enhance their civic competence for the implementation of true federalism.

Accordingly, and in specific terms, as noted by Branson (1998), civic education is saddled with the responsibility to provide the learner with knowledge, skills and disposition to:

1. **Becoming an independent member of society.** This disposition encompasses adhering voluntarily to self-imposed standards of behaviour rather than requiring the imposition of external controls, accepting responsibility for the consequences of one's actions and fulfilling the moral and legal obligations of membership in a democratic society.
2. **Assuming the personal, political, and economic responsibilities of a citizen.** These responsibilities include taking care of one's self, supporting one's family and caring for, nurturing, and educating one's children. They also include being informed about public issues, voting, paying taxes, serving on juries, performing public service, and serving in leadership positions commensurate with one's talents.
3. **Respecting individual worth and human dignity.** Respecting others means listening to their opinions, behaving in a civil manner, considering the rights and interests of fellow citizens, and adhering to the principle of majority rule but recognizing the right of the minority to dissent.
4. **Participating in civic affairs in a thoughtful and effective manner.** This disposition entails becoming informed prior to voting or participating in public debate, engaging in civil and reflective discourse, and assuming leadership when appropriate. It also entails evaluating whether and when one's obligations as a citizen require that personal desires and interests be subordinated to the public good and evaluating whether and when one's obligations or constitutional principles obligate one to reject certain civic expectations.
5. **Promoting the healthy functioning of constitutional democracy.** This disposition encompasses being informed and attentive to public affairs, learning about and deliberating on constitutional values and principles, monitoring the adherence of political leaders and public agencies to those values and principles and taking appropriate action if adherence is lacking. This disposition also inclines the citizen to work through peaceful, legal means to change laws that are thought to be unwise or unjust.

To practically bring to reality, the authors have jointly recommended with Branson (1998) that:

1. Schools should thoroughly examine the "informal curriculum," or the governance of their school community and the relationships among those within it. This would expose so many things that are necessary but absent in the formal school civic education curriculum.

2. Student participation in the governance of their classrooms and schools should be an integral part of civic education beginning from the nursery school level through their formal schooling. Classrooms and schools should be considered laboratories in which students can employ participatory skills commensurate with their maturity.
3. Civic education should help students develop a reasoned commitment to those fundamental values and principles necessary for the preservation and improvement of constitutional democracy. Civic education enables citizens to make wise choices in full awareness of alternatives and provides the kind of experiences and understanding that foster the development of a reasoned commitment to those values and principles that enable a free society to exist.
4. Every student should become familiar with the nation's fundamental documents through age-appropriate instruction. Documents such as the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the national policy on education, certain acts like the child rights act, freedom of information act etc., and national gazettes among others should be introduced to children at different levels of education.
5. Students at all grade levels can profit from the study of exemplary citizens, both the famous and not-so-famous, those from the past and from the present. The use of a wide variety of age-appropriate historical narratives, biographies, autobiographies, and current accounts in the media should be encouraged. Students, particularly in an age of anti-heroes, should have many opportunities to learn about people who have defended human rights and political freedoms, fulfilled civic responsibilities, or had the courage to make ethical and moral decisions when they were in the minority.
6. Co-curricular activities that support and extend civic education should be encouraged. Activities such as mock elections, mock trials, and simulated legislative hearings promote greater interest and understanding of government and civil society.
7. The opportunity for school and community service should be made available to all young people as a part of their civic education. Students should be prepared for age-appropriate service, adequately supervised during their service, and expected to reflect on their experiences under the guidance of qualified teachers or mentors

Obviously, if all these policy recommendations are implemented, in no distant time the question of true federalism in Nigeria will be practically answered.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The diverse nature of Nigeria necessitated the introduction of federal system of government in 1954 by the Littleton constitution. This system and practice was once challenged, though aborted, in 1966 by the Gen. J.T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi, and it constituted one of the remote causes of the Nigerian civil war. Since after then, the federalism of government has remained the subsisting system of government in the county. However, the increasing power and overwhelming influence of the federal government of Nigeria over the other component units of the federation has left more contention than satisfaction. This has given rise to what, in Nigeria's political lexicon, is today referred to as

absence of true federalism, and the clamour for the introduction or reinstatement of true federalism in the polity. Men at the helm of affairs fail to realise that there is need for honesty, fair play, integrity and prudence. The apparent lack of this value education inculcated on the Nigerian citizenry has been assumed to be the factor responsible for the poor implementation of true federalism in Nigeria.

In an effort to correct this poor value orientation, the government of Nigeria found it pertinent to introduce an educational curriculum to address this malady from the cradle. Civic education was therefore designed to inculcate these knowledge, skills and disposition towards the realisation of true federalism on the long run. The concept of civic education supposes that there is no more important task than the development of an informed, effective, and responsible citizenry. This paper therefore examines the place of civic education in the realisation of true federalism based on the components of the subject. The paper also examines the factors that really separated federalism in Nigeria from what obtains in an ideal or true federal structure.

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