

## FOSTERING CIVIC DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE NIGERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

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### Abstract

*The civic duties and responsibilities of a community or nation guide the ways of a people. They are the offshoots of the norms and values of a group of people and as such the need to inculcate these civic duties and responsibilities into the young learners becomes imperative if a society or nation must experience societal development. The National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC,2007) revisited and identified Civic Education as one of the primary school subjects amongst others that can help foster the theme of civic duties and responsibilities in the Nigerian primary school children towards making them become a responsible and law abiding citizens. However, over the years this has been pedagogically carried out to a large extent theoretically and lightly practically. It is hoped that the theme of civic duties and responsibility is imbibed by the young learners through experiential methods thereby making the school a microcosm of the larger society where the primary school children can come to know and understand their civic roles in the society.*

**Keywords:** Foster, Civic duties, Responsibilities, Primary School Children, Nigeria.

### Introduction

In most societies, no matter how primitive, the expectation is that cherished values are transmitted by adult members of the society to its younger ones and succeeding generations. In this way, every society evolves a pattern of educating its young ones to imbibe social values and be committed to societal norms. In the African traditional society, the system of education, even though typically informal was geared towards inculcating values and acceptable attitudes in children, so that they can be integrated into the society as responsible citizens. It is in this vein that African traditional education is often defined as the process of transmission of African values and accumulated knowledge of the society from one generation to another. This makes the philosophy of African traditional education one of functionalism with emphasis on producing recipients who have imbibed moral values and social responsibilities with a view to becoming productive members of their society. This also defines values as broad cultural principles that emanate from man's rationality with its basis on human conduct.

What can be deduced from the foregoing is that in the traditional African society, the focus on values was on dignity of human life, honest attitude towards labour, social justice, and respect for norms and constituted authorities and all such that promote honesty, integrity, and modesty. The same may not be said of contemporary Nigeria. What was upheld as cherished norms and values are gradually being eroded; such values that Bamisaiye (1989) described as the worth, merit or esteem which was ascribed to a person, object or idea, social group, institutions, or even countries. According to Ibekwe (2000), in present day Nigeria, the spirit of materialism is fast invading and overshadowing our traditional values and ethics. Materialism and the drive for wealth seem to have been substituted for the mark of dignity of persons. This is irrespective of where the wealth comes from. Thus values such as integrity, honesty and dint of hard work almost seem irrelevant. It is now commonplace to find our youths involved in social vices and unpatriotic attitudes as a way to attaining materialistic gains. This makes the role of education in imbibing values quite imperative.

All human societies past and present have had a vested interest in education. In the largest sense, education is any act or experience that has a formative effect on the mind, character or physical ability of the individual, while in its technical sense, education is a process by which a society deliberately transmits its accumulated knowledge, skills and values from one generation to another. This makes one crucial function of education the development of intellect and morals in the learners. In essence, education can transform the individual from ignorant and unrefined ways to a knowledgeable rational and cultured lifestyle. In this way he becomes socially acceptable while displaying appropriate behaviour and having acquired some measures of intellect, he is able to contribute to the growth of his society. He noted that one of the ideas or means of social transformation is the educational system. It is in this vein that one major concern of the Nigerian government is the transformation of her youths into effective and responsible citizens, who are able to productively contribute to the attainment for the good of the society. Against this background the National Policy on Education (2013) prescribed the inculcation of the right types of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society as one of its national educational goals. The expectation is that, the Nigerian educational process and system will produce citizens who will exhibit right attitudes and behaviour in tune with the aspiration of the Nigerian society.

As a way of inculcating values in its citizenry, the Federal Government of Nigeria through the National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC, 2007) revisited Civic Education as a school subject. Civic education is currently a field of contemporary research and practice that is producing significant pedagogical innovations. As an epistemological field of study especially in terms of its goals and the teaching learning process, there is always this strive of a transition from traditional models of civic education to new civic education, so as to ensure that all citizens participate to the fullest. This is one goal that is central to this paper. Thus in its own status, civic education is aimed at inculcating in learners through deliberate programmes of instructions, civic habits and values. Following from this, the National Educational Research and Development Council (NERCD) clarified the goals of Civic Education as quite separate from Social Studies when it defined Civic Education as:

*The process of inculcating in the individual his right and responsibilities to himself, society and government, as well as the desirable knowledge, attitude, norms, values,*

*morals, and actions necessary for the survival and sustenance of society. (NERDC. 2007:1)*

Also implicit in this definition is the recognition of the potentials of civic education in promoting social values. This is quite crucial to the central concern in this paper, that is, the attempt to examine the potentials of the theme of civic duties and responsibilities and how it can aid the development of the Nigerian primary school learners to becoming productive, responsible, caring and contributing members of the society. Specifically, in the Nigerian civic education curriculum content for primary school, civic duties and responsibilities amongst others, is a theme prescribed for primaries three, four and five. There is no gainsaying that the Nigerian government in her prescription of civic education as a school subject is of the view that the Nigerian child who is exposed to the knowledge of civic education is being prepared to become a functional citizen. On this, Cornelius, Ukpepy, Kalu and Domike (2017) conclude that civic education serves as a channel through which our young people can be inspired to aim for the common good of all Nigerians. It is also imperative at this juncture to look at the concept of civic duties and responsibilities within the context of civic education.

### **The Concept of Civic Duties and Responsibilities within the context of Civic Education**

Generally, the rationale for the study of Civic Education is hinged on the purpose of government, the nature of law, the way private behaviour affects public order, the political system and the international context of politics. This is why in most countries, formal instruction in civic education aims to provide students with an understanding of the workings of their own political system, the relationship of their country's policy to government, to world affairs and their roles as citizens in the participation of their duties and responsibilities towards the government and political system of their nation, even though some nations have interpreted civic education narrowly as the preparation for patriotism and largely as the function of governance and citizens rights and responsibilities. To a large extent the realization of maintaining and sustaining a democratic society requires that citizens be formally equipped with knowledge, skills and positive dispositions that will make them responsible and active citizens. It is against this background that civic education also emphasizes the development of skills of inquiry, critical thinking, decision making, problem solving, positive attitude towards conflict resolution, commitment to equality, respect for rules and constituted authority and responsive and responsible attitude towards the improvement of the larger society.

Precisely in Nigeria, Civic Education was re-introduced in 2007 in order to achieve desirable social change for national growth and development. In this regard Civic Education was also identified as crucial to National Development in the following ways:

*It helps citizens to understand their government and how it works. When people know how the government of their countries works, they are able to work with their government and contribute to national wellbeing.*

*It makes citizens understand democracy as the best form of government.*

*Through civic education people develop civic skills that make them to function and live productively in their communities.*

*It helps citizens participate well in the politics of their country. We take part in politics when we vote for the right people to represents us.*

*It encourages citizens to take part in social and economic activities of the society.*

*It enables citizens to accord due respect to others, including constituted authority.  
 It promotes cooperation amongst the people and social values in the society. (NERDC, 2007)*

Judging from this, Alonge, Oyiocha, Nwunka, Niworu and Oyetunde (2008) are of the view that civic education curriculum is designed to teach learners their rights, responsibilities, talent, fulfillment, open mindedness and healthy competitions which will enable them function effectively in the family, school, politics, legal system, economy, religion and culture.

While not underestimating other themes in the Nigerian primary school civic education curriculum content, the theme of civic duties and responsibilities and its place in the educational process forms the crux in this paper. In the Basic Education curriculum for civic education as published by the National Educational Research and Development Council (2007), the theme of civic duties and responsibilities is found in primaries three, four and five as shown in table 1:

**Table 1:**

**Summary of Content**

| Primary Class | Themes                      | Topics                                                    |
|---------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| Primary 3     | Duties and Responsibilities | Respect for constituted authority                         |
| Primary 4     | Duties and Responsibilities | Duties and Responsibilities of parents and their children |
| Primary 5     | Duties and Responsibilities | Attitude to victims of natural disaster                   |

**Source:** *Federal Ministry of education 9 years Basic Education Curriculum for primary 3 – 5 National Educational Research and Development Council (2007).*

From the above, the theme on respect for constituted authority ought to enable learners in primary three and four have an in-depth knowledge of what it means as well as mention the types of constituted authorities. The pupils should also be able to state the people, places and things to respect. These include family members, school authority, traditional rulers, religious leaders, political leader, public places, and places of worship, public buildings, other people's views, their cultures and belief. In primary five, the intent is to inculcate in the pupils the essence of values. In so doing the children's behaviour and decisions are guided about what is right and what is wrong. Such character moulded by values helps them to develop right actions and attitudes.

Perhaps the theme of civic duties and responsibilities will be better appreciated if an attempt is made at its definition. In John Dewey's "Democracy and Education", he proposed two radical ideas: Firstly, that all citizens not only the elites can have a life of the mind. Secondly, that lives that are only of the mind are not adequate to meet the demands of democracy. At the fundamental level and using the case of the Americans, Dewey argued that Americans as citizens must be engaged both in thoughts and in actions and noting that education is the key to such civic engagements. In this context his understanding of education is in its social nature, and how crucial it is for individuals to enter into social relations so as to become truly educated. He therefore recommended that the institutions of learning must adequately prepare students for such civic activities. This makes the school a microcosm of the society that fosters community behaviour (Erllich 2000). In a similar vein, Boyer (1987) opined that

schools should not only prepare students for productive careers, but equip them to live a life of dignity and purpose; not only to generate new knowledge, but to channel knowledge acquired to humane needs; not merely to study governments, but to shape a citizenry that can promote the public good. In this regard, the school will be seen to play a major role of nurturing the development of civic responsibility in students. This can be made more interesting if students are practically involved in exercising their civic duties and responsibilities, such as instance involving them in solving public problems.

A foremost mention of the term civic responsibility reveals notions of what it means to live in a democracy, ideas of citizenship and community involvement. However, what tends to encompass civic education can firstly be revealed in what it means to be a citizen and a good citizen at that. Westheimer and Khne (2004) have formulated three distinct conception of the good citizen that can form the agenda of civic education programme. These are the personally responsible citizen, the participatory citizen and the justice oriented citizen. The personally responsible citizenship emphasizes kindness to other people, helping others in need, telling the truth, following the rules, maintaining harmony and keeping the community clean and safe. While the participatory citizenship prioritizes engagements with national, state or local issues, working with community organizations and local government on relevant issues and getting involved in improving and strengthening one's own community. For the justice oriented citizenship, the focus is on thinking critically about systemic problems in the societies and the possibilities of social transformations as well as supporting social protest that challenges inequalities even if this involves questioning law and authority of the society. However, Yates, Youniss (1999) have noted that these conceptions of a good citizen are not mutually exclusive. Individuals as well as educational programmes may support, engage with or promote more than one and these often intercept. While Fine (2004) is of the view that building purposeful connections on the characteristics of the various conceptions could foster students understanding that these have various widening "circles of moral obligations". In all of these, what makes a good citizen is his attitude or dispositions towards civic duties and responsibilities. Thus, civic responsibilities can be described as "active participation in public life of the community in an informed, committed, and constructive manner with a focus on the common good" (Gottlieb and Robinson, 2006:16). Understandably too, this is one goal most societies strive towards. Nigeria is one of such societies that seek to foster civic duties in her citizenry even from the early years of learning.

### **Nurturing the Development of Civic Duties and Responsibilities in Nigerian Primary Schools**

Drawing from the recommendation of the National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC, 2007), the teaching of civic education in primary school is aimed to develop and transform the Nigerian child into effective citizens who would contribute productively to the realization of the Millennium Development Goals. Amongst other prescribed themes, the Nigerian child is taught civic duties and responsibilities. Precisely, in Nigerian primary schools, this theme is taught in primaries three, four and five. In primary three the emphasis is on the importance of constituted authority. The child is exposed to the meaning and types of constituted authority, as well as the essence of constituted authorities. In primary four, the theme is broken into duties and responsibilities and the constituted authority. In these themes, the children are to be exposed to the duties and responsibility of the parents and the children and the duties and responsibilities of citizens and constituted authority. Finally, in primary

five the focus is on attitude to victims of natural disasters. The knowledge to be gained will help children appreciate what it means to enjoy their rights, perform their duties to fellow human being, especially those who are victims of natural disasters. To adequately transmit the content of civic education and the goals it seeks to achieve, the dimensions of civic learning as building blocks is quite imperative as it helps to reflect on the different models of development. In this way, there is the tendency that in the teaching and learning processes the student learning outcomes for the different classes are assured.

Basically, civic education focuses in conveying knowledge, facts and information on the purpose of government, the nature of people's disposition towards political system and a broader view of policies across nations. The expectation is that knowledge derived will prepare its recipients as patriotic citizens who know their rights, duties and responsibilities. On this, Alexander, Pinson and Yonah (2011) and Levinson (2012) have noted that in more recent times there is the growing consensus that citizens also require more diverse civic knowledge and understanding such as controversial issues, inter-group relations, local processes or community affairs. Taking a cue from this, in the Nigerian Curriculum on civic education for primary five, the child through the theme of duties and responsibilities is exposed to what it means to show concern in his community's affairs through his attitudes to victims of natural disaster. In this context, he imbibes knowledge of natural disaster and its effect on life and properties. This makes him an active member of his society who requires an understanding of the duties and concept as well as the skills for reflective and responsible actions and the willingness to engage and be committed as a member of his society and concern for his fellow human beings. It is in this context that Barrett (2007) has argued that the ability to understand civic and social concepts progresses with the development of conceptual thinking. Nigerian pupils will initially understand the concept of a storm, a flood, or famine in terms of more concrete characteristics and gradually progress to more abstract dimensions that natural disasters are caused by natural forces rather than human actions. In other words through knowledge of civic education the pupils come to understand that there is an interconnectedness in which every social and civic element is dynamically defined by its relation with other aspects of realities (Barrett, 2007; Berti and Andriolo, 2001). This is made manifest with civic education because of the pedagogical strategies employed and the educational environment in which students learn significantly in such a way that it influences the level of sophistication of their conceptual understanding (Barret and Davis, 2005; Berti 2002). It is also in this context that through the themes of duties and responsibilities of citizens and constituted authorities that the pupil is able to make a linkage between what constituted authorities are and his duties and responsibilities as a citizen towards them. Furthermore, pupils learn to identify relationships between loyalty, obedience, dedication and constituted authorities.

However, if competencies in this theme must be fully achieved, the civic curriculum must develop in the young children civic knowledge, skills, dispositions and civic actions. In this context knowledge includes the important facts, concepts, issues and information. While the skills include the ways of thinking, working, communication, reasoning and investing that characterized the subject. Civic dispositions and attitudes are the feelings, attitudes and conscience that are developed through the subjects. With civic actions the children are given opportunities to experience what civic duties entails.

## **Conclusion**

So far, civic education has been identified as one subject in the Nigerian curriculum that can help to achieve and sustain citizens' rights, duties and responsibilities. This requires citizens to have knowledge, skills and dispositions that prepare them as informed responsible and active citizens. The focus on knowledge emphasizes the development of skills of enquiry, critical thinking, problem solving and dispositions as well as commitment. It is hoped that this will help the learner to prepare for responsible participation in citizenry.

Once a child can imbibe knowledge and understanding of issues such as the importance of constituted authorities, duties and responsibilities of citizens and constituted authorities, and duties and obligations of individuals towards other citizens and the government they begin to have a growing understanding on what active and responsible civic engagement is all about. This is particularly made clearer in classroom interactions where true problem solving, information gathering, critical thinking etc, the teachers are able to transmit knowledge in a way that student will demonstrate an understanding of the crucial concepts. For instance, constituted authority is better understood if teachers explain what it means from learning points of rulers such as traditional, religious and political rulers. Furthermore, the types of constituted authority can be mentioned and the need discussed. In the same way in primary four, the children can be exposed to their duties as citizens by inculcating in them social values such as loyalty, obedience, honesty, cooperation, discipline etc. in primary five, the child is made to understand his responsibility to other citizens especially in times of disaster. Also, that as a citizen he owes his nation duties and obligations. This will make more meaning to him if he is taught values such as obedience, orderliness, loyalty and patriotism, respect that are implicit of his duties and responsibilities as a citizen. The ability that allows the learners think, communicate, reason, and carry out investigation on the foregoing facts, concepts, and information characterized civic skills. In other words these varieties of skills are also quite important for effective participation in their civic life.

The Nigerian child's disposition towards his civic duties and responsibilities need to be reinforced so that he is well committed to it. This will in turn make him a virtuous citizen who will take responsibility for civic actions. Values can be fostered in young children through motivating civic actions. This is because young children may express very little interest in the conventional civic duties and responsibilities. However, when they are engaged in what actually captivates their interests they may be motivated to act alongside. For instance, in teaching the meaning of constituted authority, the teacher can draw examples from traditional rulers, religious leaders, political leaders, and heads of organizations whose roles the children admire and they want to emulate. In the same vein, in primary four in teaching the duties of citizen the teacher may begin with children as citizens of the nation who also owe their loyalty to the nation. They can also be taught the benefits of some social values such as honesty, punctuality and dedication to duty. The disposition of the primary five children towards their fellow citizens should culminate in the sacrifice they can make towards the nation. This would help them appreciate what civic identities entail, develop a sense of efficacy and be responsible to their community. As Levinson (2012) succinctly puts it, in civic practice students tend to develop a positive sense of agency and efficacy where agency refers to the sense of being a meaningful participant in his nation's welfare, and efficacy refers to the confidence in the individual's ability to take action, effect change and achieve a desired result.

Finally, opportunities for experiencing civic actions constitute a crucial building block of learning in civic education (Beaumont, 2010; Levinson, 2010; Torney-Purta and Barber, 2011). While the curriculum through its themes affords learners opportunities for exposures in civic learning, on their own the young learners bring to the classroom a wide variety of civic life experiences. For instance, in the religious, political and communal sectors they may have encountered the roles played by the leaders. Similarly, they may have some understanding of respect due to these authorities. Also drawing from families, the media and their peer groups, they may have also gained some forms of knowledge. All of these they bring into the classroom as wide variety of experiences with civic life in addition to rich teaching opportunities for meaningful learning process. Against this background, Bennett, Freelon, & Wells (2010), Hart & Gullan (2010), Levinson (2012), Kahne & Westheimer (2006) have suggested that with true experiences and real life civic actions as a wholesome pedagogy, students can acquire a deeper meaning of knowledge and concepts as well as develop an increased mastering of skills. In this way, civic actions provide the means for reflective practice necessary to connect abstract ideas with real life situations.

Thus, with a wide range of prescribed text books, materials and other sources of information the civic education curriculum should encourage active participation, especially when the right teaching strategies are employed. These include class discussion, visitation to places where there are constituted authorities, role plays and simulations. Some children can dramatize as kings and others as the subjects, some as religious leaders and others as members of the congregations; while, others can take roles as governors, political leaders and heads of organizations. In such roles, the attempt is to depict what constituted authorities are, the roles of such authorities and their roles as citizens. Furthermore, active participation can be promoted in the classroom where a class prefect is elected or nominated and his role made clear. This real life situation can also be taken beyond the school walls where students are made to engage in community activities. In all of these, the aim is to make students become informed, responsible, take appropriate actions and reflect on these so as to improve their learning as citizens.

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