

Fostering Democratic Practices through Co-operative Learning in Secondary Schools: Towards Matured Democratic Dispensation

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ABSTRACT There is a close affinity between democratic practices at school and the promotion of democratic norms and values in the larger society. This survey seeks to establish how democratic schools are in their administrations and in operations. The south-south geographical zone of Nigeria was the focus of the study. 750 school principals and vice- principals were randomly selected from the six states that make-up the zone. Three research questions guided the descriptive study using a structured questionnaire titled "Administrative Social-Motivation" (ASM) developed by the researchers. Data were collected using a 4-point Likert-like Scale of agreement designated from 4 - very great extent (VGE) to 1, mild extent (ME). The instrument contained 30 items in three sections A, B and C, each containing 10 items only. Mean score (\bar{X}) of 2.50 and above scale was adopted for items dominant at schools. Findings indicate that schools are predominantly governed in non-democratic manner. It is recommended that schools should use instructional tools to infuse democratic practices in schools administration and operation.

INTRODUCTION

One of Nigeria's goals as a nation as contained in the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) is to build a free and democratic society. For this goal to be in the country's education policy is recognition of schools as agents of political socialization. Understanding the notion of democracy and being democratic involve democratic inputs processes/actions for democratic outcomes. Held (cited in Bansal 2007) contends that democracy entails 'a form of politics and life in which there are fair and just ways of negotiating values and value disputes'. According to Held democracy re-conceptualizes and reconciles a concern with individual and collective self-determination in which 'autonomy' and 'independence' is central. However, Almond et al. (2004) state that it often takes time to establish democratic institutions and have citizens recognize them and comply with the rules of the process. It is prudent to approximate democracy as much as possible within school system policies, if democracy is the stable form of government in any country. Not only will firsthand schooling in democratic processes contribute to enlightened citizenship in adulthood, it will also enable teachers to accommodate students need for self-determination. Aggarwal (2005) posits that educating students in democratic values and principles are three -fold: (1) To convey to students the meaning of democratic values; (2) to

enable the students to incorporate these values, ideas and principles in their daily routine and conduct in and out of school; and (3) a democratic school introduces radical changes in instructional techniques, methods and activities. This requires team work – via co-operation and collaboration. Team meeting becomes a forum for discussion and shared decision-making as avenue for clear understanding and subsequent collaboration in dialogue and assurance of democratic participation.

Crowl et al. (1999) outline basic guidelines for fostering the understanding of democratic socialization in classrooms/schools with the focus on creating practical experiences for students to challenge their emotional competences in terms of self and social behaviour for them to become compassionate citizens later in life. Students have to learn such principles as working for common good, empathy, conflict management, building bonds, team work and collaboration. Gollnick and Chinn (2002) posit that education in a multicultural setting will confront inequalities in schools and communities and that school should take steps to eliminate such inequalities. These researchers recommend two approaches to overcoming inequalities in schools and communities- teaching for social justice and democratic classrooms. Social justice education believes in human rights and the rule of law regardless of socio-economic status; gender, sexual orientation or ethnic, racial or

cultural backgrounds. Democratic classrooms engage both students and teachers in learning to lead and to follow and to be teachers and students together. Power relations between students and teachers are enacted in classroom. Teachers and other school officials can use their power to develop either democratic setting in which students are active participants in autocratic setting controlled totally by adults. According to Glasser (1998), democratic classroom challenges the authoritarianism of the teachers and breaks down power relations between teachers and students. From this vantage position, students can always analyze school and societal practice in terms of equity and social justice.

Parkey and Stanford (2010) agree with the views of Golinick and Chinn (2002) but add that teachers who allow students to participate in making decisions about the physical classroom environment, classroom rules/procedure, modification of curriculum and options for learning activities have less discipline problems; that students in any democratic classroom have more power and more responsibility than those in conventional classroom. However, if students are to live democratically they must learn to manage freedom and responsibility. Teachers model democracy by giving their students some choices/options and control over classroom activities (Olele and Williams 2009).

Sadker and Sadker (2003) posit that many schools are run in a 'top-down' manner with a chain of command with total absence of students in governance. The issue then is, can education embrace non-authoritarian form of communication and shared decision making which are attributes of democracy? You cannot produce democrats in authoritarian relationships. Schools exist now, to promote democratic values in response to the changing needs of children and the society. Nath (cited in Stevenson 1992) states that

“Educators (must) have a collaborative relationship with students.

This doesn't mean students run the class; teachers have a clear idea

of... goals and most of the strategies to be used. But they encourage

students to produce solutions to problems.”

This is to say that school authority can share authority in many ways. Winch and Gingell (1999) agree that to promote democratic values, schools have to remove authoritarian rela-

tionships from education in all ramifications. Singh (2007) notes that, democracy is not a mere political ideal, but a way of life, which covers all aspects of living, working, and learning together, in societies that are plural and multicultural.

From choice theory perspective, misbehavior occurs in the classroom when students are not free and where a single group dominates others, where basic human rights might be trampled. According to Glasser (1998), choice theory is a relationship based theory and as such has particular advantage when applied in the context of group dynamics. Choice theory suggests that all behavior is purposeful and is associated with the drive to satisfy needs, which could be physiological or psychological. These attributes are significant in developing and maintaining long-term relationships. Effective group according to Borich (2011) occurs when positive group process are in place and when individuals are able to get along with others, to collaborate, to communicate, to resolve differences and work for a common good. Many researchers are of the view that educators are frequently pressured to teach children self-governing principles through textbooks, that is not enough; children should have opportunities of working together to accept and share responsibilities; work with problems which have some significance to them.

Parkey and Stanford (2010) state that school curriculum pay attention to programme of activities with emphasis, on hidden curricular which focuses on what students learn through day to day experiences at school; and extra-curriculum programme that focuses on school sponsored activities. Jordan and Nettle (1999) in a study found that students who participated in extra-curriculum activities tend to perform better in school work. Glasser (1998), Johnson and Johnson (2006) emphasize that quality in education comes from democratic and participatory approach to teaching and learning with the focus on cooperative learning as a strategy. Cooperative learning gives students regular practices in developing social and moral competences as a cohesive and caring community by breaking down ethnic, religious, social and cultural barriers; and provides forum for finding new ways of dealing with relationship problems. No grouping designs are better suited to democratic socialization than the assorted strategy generally referred to collectively as co-operative

learning (Slavin 1995). To Johnson and Johnson (2006), the key elements that define true cooperative groups are: face-to-face interaction, positive interdependence, individual accountability, collaboration skills and group processing. The common purpose of cooperative learning is to promote interdependent learning. Children can develop to be dynamic and healthy citizens; build capacity to understand and solve diverse problems; to think and decide on issues; to be conscious of their rights and duties, to shoulder responsibilities, to have sense of service and sacrifices, be of good behaviour and have respect for moral values (Singh 2007).

Three theoretical perspectives have guided this study: (1) cognitive developmental, (2) behavioural and, (3) social interdependence. The cognitive-developmental or constructivist perspective is largely based on the theories of Piaget and Vygotsky (as in Santrock 2008). The work of Piaget and related theories are based on the premise that when individuals co-operate in any environment, socio-cognitive conflict occurs and this stimulates cognitive development. The work of Vygotsky (as in Santrock 2008) is based on the premise that knowledge is socially, constructed from cooperative efforts to learn, understand and solve problems.

The behavioral learning perspective focuses on changes in behavior as an outcome of learning. Skinner (cited in Johnson and Johnson 2006) focuses on imitation and joint efficacy. Social interdependence theory is based on the premises that the way in which goals are structured determines how participants interact, and these interaction patterns determine the outcomes of the situation. These interactions promote learning; as individuals encourage and facilitate each other's effort to complete a task, to achieve group's goals. These efforts consist of a number of variables — mutual help, assistance, exchange of ideas and resources, effective communication, mutual influence, trust, and constructive management of conflict (Santrock 2008). Hoy and Miskel (2008) posit that evolving constructivist views of learning fuel interest in collaborative and interpersonal skills. To them, the key characteristics of constructivist teaching are complex, real-life learning environment and social interaction. Educators are turning to learning in real context and learning by doings. According to Aristotle (Wikipedia), 'For the things we have to learn be-

fore we can do them, we learn by doing'. Furthermore, Hoy and Miskel believe that cooperative teaching in general is not always the best for students with learning disabilities and opts for mixed ability groups, which is outstanding as students could engage in peer tutoring as means of helping others. (Olele 2005)

Media report by Musari in *The Guardian* (Sunday, February 21, 2010) reports of a pilot effort by a non-governmental organization — "Children and Youth Awareness Development Foundation" (CYDEM) in collaboration with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) of Nigeria, to conduct elections in ten pilot schools within the Federal Capital Territory. The group fashioned out a way of teaching and grooming primary and secondary school pupils to adopt a system of choosing their school prefects through electoral process; against the prevailing scheme of teachers installing leaders on the pupils.

Again, Media report by Edumark consult in *The Guardian* (Thursday, March 4, 2010) in Nigeria presents a picture of a cross-section of participatory students during the public presentation of the fourth edition of the students' publication — "We are the future of our nation". These are laudable service projects. If electoral process and students' publication effort are inculcated early in life, the children will grow with the idea of a workable transparent electoral process and in which the students can express themselves freely. These gestures are in keeping with the views of Dewey in terms of developing social system through experiences — learning-by-doing, and the power of simulations. Creation of realistic electoral simulations offers opportunities to enliven democratic process in ways that were just not possible before in Nigeria.

From another stance, Youniss (2006), advocate for service learning in schools. Service learning is a form of education that promotes social responsibility and service to the community. According to Sadker and Sadker (2003), in service learning, students engage in activities that are community-oriented. One goal of service learning is to help students to become less self-centered and more strongly motivated to help others (Pritchard and Whitehead 2004). The benefits of service learning, both for the volunteer and for the recipient, suggest that more students should be required to participate in service learning programme (Benson et al. 2006).

Sadker and Sadker (2003), further state that service learning goes beyond academic learning as response to the developmental needs of responsibility and accountability.

Statement of the Problem

Nascent democracy in Nigeria is usually characterized by excessive/clash, violence, disfranchisement, rigging, private armies, intimidation, influence of godfathers, selection rather than election, assassination and other social problems. It is very unfortunate to note that proponents of democracy and actors on the political arena are products of the education system of Nigeria. Hence, one is tempted to wonder if schools actually prepare her students on how to function in a democratic setting, for students cannot function as democrats unless they have the opportunity to participate in democratic activities.

In the same vein, the political structuring and equation of most states in Nigeria for instance have witnessed severed upturn and mutation in this political dispensation, courtesy the judiciary. Why? It is either there was excessive voting, meaning votes cast were far above votes registered or there were monumental evidences of wide rigging. To add to these migraines, our political leaders hardly accept simple defeat. In fact in their political encyclopedia, there is nothing like defeat. It must be victory all the time. The non-transparent, non-fair and non-free nature of our electioneering system may have been responsible for these postures of theirs. These and others were the major challenges that triggered the interest of the researchers to conducting a study in this direction.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study include:

1. To determine how democratic schools are in their administration/operation;

2. To determine social cooperative strategies that prevail in the schools; and
3. To determine motivational programmes/activities that exists in the schools.

Research Questions

1. How democratic are schools in their administration/operation?
2. What social cooperative strategies prevail in schools?
3. What motivational programmes/activities exist in schools?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design: The study is a descriptive survey in the sense that findings were not compared; thus, only research questions were used.

Population: The principals and vice principals in states in the South-South, Nigeria were used in the study.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique: The simple size used was 750, comprising 381 principals and 369 vice principals. The random sample technique was used. The category and number of the sample size is as shown in Table 1.

Instrumentation: An administrative-social-motivational (ASM) structured questionnaire designed by the researchers was the instrument used in the study. It was a 4-point scale instrument with such designate; 4-very great extent (VGE), 3 - great extent (GE), 2 - moderate extent (MOE) and 1 - mild extent (ME). The accepted mean value mean (\bar{X}) is 2.5. The instrument contains 30 items in three sections A, B, and C, each containing 10, items only. Dominant and not-dominant democratic traits are designated D and ND respectively.

Validation: The instrument went through various stages of formative evaluation. Fellow researchers especially in test construction and measurement gave the instrument the deserved critique.

Reliability: To ensure the reliability of the instrument, a test-retest technique was adopted.

Table 1: Category/number of sample size

Category	Ranks	Akwa Ibom	Bayelsa	Cross Rivers	Delta	Edo	Rivers	Total
Senior	Principal	32	20	34	36	24	48	194
Secondary	Vice	30	22	32	34	34	50	193
Junior	Principal	35	18	29	35	26	44	187
Secondary	Vice	34	18	31	28	22	43	176
Total		131	78	126	133	97	185	750

Table 2: Features of democratic administration in schools

S. No.	Description	VGC	GE	MOE	ME	Score	\bar{X}	Remark
1	There is respect for individual personality.	150	100	300	200	1,700	2.20	ND
2	Students are involved in school management.	133	97	260	240	1,209	1.61	ND
3	Equal admission opportunity.	300	173	207	70	2,203	2.94	D
4	Allows students parliament.	137	123	292	208	1,379	1.84	ND
5	Schools rules jointly made.	141	111	237	261	1,491	2.00	ND
6	Schools emphasize moral values.	299	174	194	83	1,189	2.92	D
7	Students' rights are made known to them.	149	103	240	260	1,637	2.18	ND
8	Constructive conflict management.	161	104	304	181	1,745	2.33	ND
9	Moral values are upheld.	301	172	191	86	1,653	2.92	D
10	Schools prefects/captains are elected.	154	101	256	299	1,730	2.31	ND

A reliable co-efficient of 0.54 was obtained using the Pearson-Product Moment correlation coefficient technique.

Administration of the Instrument: The researchers combined direct delivery (face-to-face) with mailing. The direct delivery was used for the schools within Rivers State and the mailing procedure was used for the schools outside the state. No wonder the study lasted up to a period of four months.

RESULTS

Table 2 shows paucity in the providence of democratic features in schools administrations. There is glaring evidence of lack of respect for individual personality, student's involvement in school administrations, student's parliament and student non- partisan in making school rules. Also, the table shows gross evidence of absence of students knowing what constitute their rights, lack of constructive conflict management and appointment rather than election of school prefects/captains. The mean score for these variables stand at 2.2, 1.61, 1.84, 2.00, 2.18, 2.33 and 2.31 respectively. However, there is ample

evidence of some democratic features: equal admission opportunity; emphasis on moral values. The mean (\bar{X}) scores stand at 2.94, 2.92, and 2.92, respectively.

Table 3 displayed social cooperative strategies as evident in schools. Respect for others view has a mean of (2.18) community service (2.28); group work (2.28), use of simulations/games (2.37), prevalence of discussion methods/strategies (2.24) and engagement of politicians as resource persons (2.33). On the other hand, encouraging effective communication as a school norm has a mean value of (3.11), learning by doing (2.90) encouragement of self expression (2.86) and the use of contrived activities features (2.62). Of the ten items, D = 4 and ND = 6 in favour of ND.

Table 4 displays motivational programme/activities, the mean of field trips/excursions (2.12), functional dramatic club (1.80), literacy club (2.17) and science club (2.34) ICTs centre (2.31) debate/quizzes/prize/award days (2.90), cultural day (1.87) after school programme (2.30). The mean (\bar{X}) rating is at variance for the following motivational activities; promotion of sports competition (2.83); organization of

Table 3: Social cooperative strategies

S. No.	Description	VGC	GE	MOE	ME	Score	\bar{X}	Remark
11	Students taught to respect others views.	143	99	227	271	1,594	2.13	ND
12	Effective communication is encouraged.	250	273	108	99	2,334	3.11	D
13	Services learning are promoted.	177	73	280	220	1,707	2.28	ND
14	Group work is encouraged.	177	73	280	220	1,707	2.28	ND
15	Students 'learn by doing'.	278	167	191	94	2,169	2.90	D
16	Encourages self expression in class.	288	177	178	107	2,146	2.86	D
17	Games/simulations are used during teaching.	165	100	294	191	1,739	2.37	ND
18	Whole school/class discussion on academic / social issues are held on broad range of issues.	162	88	270	230	1,682	2.24	ND
19	Most co-operative activities are contrived in ways that it is difficult for students to learn without cooperating with one another.	155	100	246	309	1,967	2.62	D
20	Politicians serve as resource persons.	161	104	304	181	1,745	2.33	ND

Table 4: Motivational programmes/activities

S. No.	Description	VGC	GE	MOE	ME	Score	\bar{X}	Remark
21	School arranges field trips/excursion	94	106	199	301	1,593	2.12	ND
22	There is functional dramatic club.	101	97	58	342	1,353	1.80	ND
23	Literary club is operational.	176	74	299	221	1,630	2.17	ND
24	Sport competition are promoted	240	283	109	98	2,125	2.83	D
25	School science club is functional.	163	110	297	180	1,756	2.34	ND
26	School has ICTs centre.	153	102	257	298	1,730	2.31	ND
27	Schools organize debate/quiz, prize/award days.	297	168	190	95	2,167	2.90	D
28	Schools organize cultural days.	99	105	194	302	1,401	1.87	ND
29	Schools organizes end of the year celebration.	248	270	108	104	2,222	2.83	D
30	Schools engage in after school programmes.	152	103	254	301	1,726	2.30	ND

school debate/quiz (2.90) and organization of end-of-the-year celebration (2.83). Of the ten items, six are in favour of ND category.

Table 5 on the whole shows that out of 30 items that make up the instrument, 30% of such are practiced or dominant in the schools while 70% of the same instrument are not dominant in the schools. These are indications of undemocratic practices in schools.

Table 5: Percentage (%) of democratic features in schools

	Description	%
D	3,6,12,15,16,24,27,29	30
ND	1,2,3,4,5,,8,10,11,13,14,17,18,19,20,21,22,23,25,26,28,30	70

DISCUSSION

Schools administration and operation in Nigeria are basically authoritative as indicated from the responses on research question one. School are yet to be seen as micro societies that will help in building a free and democratic society as enshrined in the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004). It is obvious from the study that democratic features are not noticeable in schools; that students are not involved in the administration and management of secondary schools. This explains why teachers struggle with classroom management because their actions are guided by stimulus-response theory. They try to coerce students through reward or punishment. This negates the principles of choice theory of quality classroom based on democratic features with the focus on teachers leading rather than bossing; non-coercive relationships with students; teach meaningful skills rather than what they may not use in the world of work; enable them to experience satisfaction and excitement

by working in small teams; move from teacher evaluation to student self-evaluation. With all these in place, there will be fewer discipline problems as students are actively involved in the learning process. The fact remains that, it is what students are exposed to that they carry to the larger society. If they have democratic experiences in school, they will carry same to the larger world; on the contrary, they are bound to repel democratic dispensations. This finding corroborates the effects of students' school experiences on their later life (Crowl et al. 1999; Olele and Williams 2009). This study opts for a shift from authoritarianism to democracy in school administration and operation (Glasser 1998). In addition, the study corroborates the fundamental fact that man is not a solitary but social being that must live and interact with members within and outside the school community. As social beings, students need to respect the views of others, participate in extracurricular/ co-curricular activities; such activities provide opportunities for the use of social and academic skills in many different contexts (Jordan and Nettles 1999; Parkey and Stanford 2010). From resource persons or more knowledgeable others, students learn so much from practical real life circumstances (Vygotsky cited in Santrock 2008; Olele 2005). All these social cooperative strategies are in line with the opinion of Nath (cited in Stevenson 1992) and Johnson and Johnson (2006), that co-operative learning and collaborative process, share the complementary objective of engaging students in the learning process and promoting the higher thought processes and more authentic behaviours required in the world of work, community and family. The study also established that motivational programmes are yet to gain ground in our schools. These programmes can eventually lead to different careers options; with the

serious unemployment situation in Nigeria, and the clamor for entrepreneurial skills/ activities for job and wealth creation. Most motivational programmes/activities are usually regarded as 'vocational exploration', as some may later lead to future career pathways for students. The study also revealed that competitive sports are promoted. When students engage in competition, they normally strive to outshine their fellow contestants; as winners they are normally motivated and would strive to maintain their feet. However, students should learn to accept defeat and prepare rigorously for subsequent competitions. This obviously has some political undertone and motivations sets in here. Students are motivated when they are aware of the benefits of what they are learning (Borich 2011). They became use to performing a task for its own sake; the satisfaction and joy derived from doing such task is a kind of intrinsic motivation (Pratt 1994).

CONCLUSION

Democracy is the acceptable government of the day internationally and locally. In its development and sustenance and in line with democratic standards witnessed in developed world like Europe, America, France, among others, the role of the school is indispensable. The study contends that democratic values and virtues should be emphasized and practiced in schools. If schools are to educate for democracy, they must practice what they preach. They must be organized in such a way as to develop democratic norms, skills and values through experience and shared decision-making. In other words, there should be a fraternal relationship between what obtains at school and in real life situations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There should be a paradigm shift from authoritarianism to democracy by school administrators and teachers in school governance;

- Schools should be democratic in administration and operations as means of preparing students for life in the larger society;
- Instructional methods, techniques, and activities should include social cooperative/ collaborative elements as strategies of exposing students to the art and science of working and living together;

Extra curricular and co-curricular motivational programmes/activities should be emphasized in schools;

- Keen competitions should be encouraged in schools, and while winners should be applauded or reinforced positively, losers should be encouraged with the hope of winning next time.
- Finally, the school should be able to tap the rich resources that abound the communities where it is located, for communities' parade human recourses and political institutions that could add to the life experience of students when fully explored.

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