

ELECTORAL EDUCATION CONCEPTS' INFUSION INTO THE NATIONAL VALUES CURRICULUM AND THE PRESERVATION OF DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This article explores integrating Electoral Education into Nigeria's National Values Curriculum to promote democratic principles among youth. It addresses historical challenges in Nigeria's democracy, advocating for educational intervention to counter electoral malpractices and voter apathy. Efforts by IFES and NERDC to incorporate Electoral Education are examined, mapping themes on democracy, elections, governance, and citizenship. The curriculum aims to inform citizens and encourage responsible participation. Core democratic principles, such as equality, dignity, transparency, and participation, underpin the curriculum. It highlights the importance of teacher training and professional development and concludes that successful curriculum integration empowers students to understand, engage in, and uphold democratic processes for the nation's future.



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1. Introduction

In Nigeria, attempts at democratization started under the Colonial Administration, especially in the 1954 and 1959 elections that ushered in political independence in 1960. The political dispensation of the country since then and over the past decades has been characterised by the culture of rigging, malpractices, intimidation of both voters and opposition, use of violence, and political thuggery. The electorates have also played active roles in the exhibition of political behaviors that were bedeviled with rigging, violence, and unrest.

The resultant effect of all these has manifested in a lack of understanding of voting procedures, vote-buying, underage voting, campaign irregularities, manipulation of results, political apathy in terms of poor turnout and participation in voter registration, and disenchanting orientation/attitudes of Nigerians towards elections and preservation of democratic principles. The seeming inability of the government to address these issues and curb the accompanying dangers to the democratic principles of the Nigerian nation has engendered the need for school curricula intervention, especially among growing citizens who are expected to be leaders of tomorrow. Such intervention becomes very germane based on the fact that the most direct challenge to the preservation of democratic principles is found among those who say that the low level of citizen involvement is a problem that should not be rationalised away but solved.

The current National Values Curriculum, which contains significant themes like Social Studies, Civic Education, and Security Education, was therefore identified as one central channel for complementing the various electoral reforms being introduced by the government so that a more resounding positive change in the attitude of citizens to active participation in the electoral process and the promotion and preservation of democratic principles can be better assured.

This paper, therefore, attempts to examine the current efforts being made by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and Nigeria's highest curriculum development agency, the Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), to develop and commence the infusion of Electoral Education Curriculum into the Civic Education Theme of the National Values Curriculum at the Basic Education level in Nigeria.

The response addresses the critical issue of strengthening democratic values within the Nigerian state. As democratic principles face threats of erosion, citizens must cultivate democratic mindsets from a young age. Civic education within the school curriculum presents an impactful way to foster democratic values and responsibilities among Nigerians. When a robust civic component is meaningfully incorporated into academic lessons, it can effectively instil the ideals of democracy.

By teaching students about their democratic rights and duties as citizens, the school system empowers future generations to participate actively and meaningfully in the democratic process. It also teaches about Nigeria's

democratic system, history and governance structures. Through interactive, real-world examples, civic education illustrates how democratic values like the rule of law, transparency, accountability, and participation realize societal stability and progress. It helps students recognize how democratic decline often begins with the neglect of these fundamental values.

A curriculum with a strong focus on civic duties readies youth to protect democracy by engaging responsibly in issues that affect their nation and communities. It cultivates qualities necessary for the democratic progress of Nigeria, such as consent of the governed, free and fair elections, respect for human rights and peaceful conflict resolution. Entrenching civic responsibilities and democratic principles into Nigerian school lessons holds immense potential to revitalize the country's democratic culture from the grassroots. An educated, civically aware citizenry forms the surest foundation for a thriving, long-lasting democracy.

2. The Electoral Education Curriculum: A Review

The desire to entrench and promote democratic culture among citizens and good ethics of the electoral system, primarily through the formal school curriculum, informed the consciousness to introduce Electoral Education by IFES and NERDC as an emerging issue in the Nigerian school curriculum. This desire is in response to recognizing the importance of preparing the young ones for a better tomorrow, particularly in their responsibilities towards contributing to the evolution of sound democratic principles and making democracy work.

The Electoral Education Curriculum, therefore, is a deliberate intervention document required to provide citizens of democracy with politically non-partisan basic information about the importance of participating actively in elections. The integration process started with convincing the curriculum development agency in Nigeria (NERDC) of the need for analyzing the Electoral Education Curriculum with the ultimate desire to carry out some curriculum insertions of relevant concepts and issues into the National Values Curriculum's theme of Civic Education at the Basic Education level.

The Electoral Education Curriculum is being developed in Nigeria for learners at the basic education level to achieve specific objectives, as stated by IFES (2021). These objectives include:

1. To impart core knowledge and understanding of democracy, the electoral process, and principles of good governance among learners.
2. To acquaint learners with the electoral process and laws governing elections for informed political choices;
3. To develop consciousness in learners about their rights and obligations in the electoral process;

4. To sensitize learners on the importance of votes to the political and economic stability of Nigeria;
5. To create awareness in learners of the benefits of responsible participation in the electoral process to peace, stability, and nation-building;
6. To get learners to appreciate the consequences of voter apathy and election violence
7. To equip learners with the necessary awareness and skills to engage responsibly in the electoral process as future voters.

The initiators of the Electoral Education Curriculum drew up relevant suggested themes, topics, and contents for enrichment and infusion into the relevant theme of the Basic Education National Values Curriculum, which in this case is Civic Education. The four themes and the relevant topics identified for infusion (IFES/NERDC, 2021) include:

Theme 1 : Evolution of Nigeria's political system: forms of government practised in Nigeria, colonialism and colonial government, a military takeover of government, democracy, democratic government, and Nigeria's electoral history.

Theme 2 : Elections and Electoral Process: elections, electoral process, voting, election materials, electoral management bodies, political parties, political systems, corruption in the electoral process, electoral violence and safety, threats to electoral process the electoral cycle, inclusiveness in the electoral process, and electoral laws.

Theme 3 : Leadership and good governance: leaders, followers, leadership, followership, good governance, and the rule of law.

Theme 4 : Building National Consciousness: citizenship, national identity, national unity, volunteerism, community mobilization, and national core values.

These themes and topics have been subjected to the due process of curriculum mapping about the carrier subject, National Values and spread across all the levels of primary education. Although the process of infusion is still ongoing at the time of writing this article, one needs to remark that it has reached an advanced stage and will soon be made teachable in the Nigerian school system as soon as the necessary final approval is taken.

3. Nigeria's Basic Education National Values Curriculum

According to Eheazu The development of the National Values Curriculum by the Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) in collaboration with the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offenses Commission (ICPC) was informed by the desire to use the school system as an additional channel to preach the anti-corruption gospel and lay a solid foundation among the Nigerian youth. The initiators were convinced that mobilization of the

youth for active participation in national issues is a critical building block for constructing a viable nation because the youth are the future (ICPC, 2016).

To effectively prosecute the anti-corruption crusade through the school system, the due process of curriculum development was initiated by the NERDC for the National Values Curriculum, with prescribed philosophy, goals, objectives, and contents agreed upon for Nigeria's educational system's primary, secondary and tertiary levels. The aims of the curriculum include but are not limited to promoting value re-orientation and discipline among recipients, ensuring adequate protection of life and property, instilling in learners acceptable moral and social values in breeding character, fostering peaceful co-existence, and a sense of unity and patriotism.

This subject comprises the bodies of knowledge grouped under Civic Education (CE), Social Studies (SS), and Security Education (SE). Contents are planned for all the learners at the basic education level to take Social Studies, Civic Education, and Security Education themes.

According to Ajayi (2017), the objectives of National Values include but are not limited to the following.

1. To promote value re-orientation and discipline among recipients.
2. To guarantee robust safeguards for life and possessions in the country.
3. To instil in learners acceptable moral and social values in breeding good character, attitude, and behavior.
4. To foster peaceful co-existence, a sense of unity, and a patriotic spirit.
5. To promote democratic values, the dignity of labour and respect for fundamental human rights.
6. To encourage good, responsible, and functional citizens and provide practical solutions to ravaging social problems/
7. To promote national heritage, culture, and reputation.
8. To promote social orderliness and a conducive environment for a prosperous personal and communal life.
9. To promote good leadership and followership qualities.
10. To enable learners to understand the interconnectedness, interrelatedness, and interdependence of human beings and their immediate and global environment

The curriculum is meant to instil core Nigerian values desirable for good citizens. Security education is added to make learners at younger ages mindful of security challenges and how to go about solving such challenges for the more significant benefit of the nation. Twelve core values were identified for building the curriculum contents: three core values and nine others. These identified values

informed the curriculum themes and were further broken down into teachable topics in the National Values Curriculum.

These values include honesty, justice, discipline, right attitude to work, citizens' rights and duties, national consciousness, commitment, courage, regard and concern for the interest of others, family values, religious and spiritual values, and Nigerian traditional values.

In the curriculum, Social Studies was grouped alongside Civic Education, and a new one- Security Education, under a new name called "National Values". The new curriculum arrangement came in place to address the issue of topic, content, and subject overload as well as repetitions within the subjects without any reduction in the depth, appropriateness, and interconnectedness of the curricula as part of the Education Sector's role in the facilitation of the realization of the achievement of the core objectives of National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS), Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It also came in response to the Nigerian society's ever-changing needs, challenges, and aspirations.

The core values and other values identified in the curriculum are meant to develop self-worth and dignity in the youth and assist in the internalization of worthwhile values in Nigerian children. The infusion of electoral education into the National Values Curriculum would also be expected to help the learners have a better understanding of democracy and contribute significantly to their consciousness to actively play a better role in the preservation of its principles.

4. Principles of Democracy and the Needed Preservation through the Classroom ia's Basic Education National Values Curriculum

The concept of democracy has been defined as the governance of a populace through open participation in voting and other civic involvement. This definition is according to Civiced, an organization that advocates for civic education.

Democracy is a widely accepted system of governance built on shared values of freedom, equality and justice that the global community upholds, regardless of variations in culture, economic conditions, political systems or societal constructs between nations. At its core, democracy signifies the self-determination of individuals collectively as members of a society through inclusive, lawful processes. Democracy is sometimes called "popular sovereignty." and can refer to direct, participatory and representative forms of rule by the people. It emphasizes that people are the ultimate authority and the source of government authority.

Some of the principles of democracy which people around the world have identified must exist in order to have a democratic government, and which the infusion of Electoral Education can help preserve in the classroom while teaching

the Civic Education Theme of National Values will include the political equality of all citizens, a democratic system, the authority vested in institutions of governance draws legitimacy from the sanction of the citizens they represent and serve. It also includes human dignity and tolerance of diversity in the preservation and promotion of dignity and fundamental human rights of individuals to achieve social justice and foster the economic and social development of the community, civility and the rule of law, accountability and transparency, regular free and fair elections, political and economic freedom, democracy in ensuring the freedom and equal rights to vote. They protect citizens' involvement because a free and equal electorate can insist on the maintenance of that freedom and equality. Other than that there is citizen participation and involvement. This may take many forms, including running for office, voting in elections, becoming informed, debating issues, attending community meetings, being members of private voluntary organizations, paying taxes, and even protesting.

These principles of democracy all relate to one another. While different democracies around the world may vary in their structure and functions of government, citizens of democratic nations broadly embrace certain core values and expectations of their leadership, such as participation in the political process, protection of civil liberties, and responsive representation. The implication of these principles to a National Values Curriculum with infused Electoral Education contents is that it is possible to provide a proper grounding for our young ones to grow in a free society where freedom and equality are meaningful so that they can make informed choices as Nigerian citizens and help build a more robust democracy.

5. IFES/NERDC's Efforts at Infusing Electoral Education into the National Values Curriculum

According to Eheazu (2017), the Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), in collaboration with the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), commenced the project of integrating Electoral Education concepts into the school system through the Basic Education National Values Curriculum some years ago. The two organizations adopted the interdisciplinary approach as one central channel for challenging learners to be more knowledgeable and responsible in democratic principles and practices.

The thematic approach was suggested for building the content areas of the Electoral Education Curriculum, and this allowed for a seamless infusion into the National Values Curriculum, which has already adopted the same approach in its design. Fusible relevant themes were identified at a workshop, and experts in content analysis/development and curriculum development were then put together to identify appropriate points for inserting the Electoral Education themes, topics, and contents into the National Values Curriculum. In order to

ensure the production of a teachable and spiral-infused National Values Curriculum, a framework for curriculum mapping was conducted. The process involved the identification of sub-themes and topics in the National Values Curriculum-Civic Education component and matching such with appropriate sub-themes and topics in the Electoral Education Curriculum across all the basic levels of Nigeria's education system.

The IFES and NERDC have been quite painstaking in their steps toward integrating Electoral Education into the Citizen Education Theme of the National Values Curriculum at the Basic Education level. The process has involved the creation of a concept map for the two curricula concerning their topics to see if there are areas of overlap or enrichment. They identified any Electoral Education competencies associated with the key concepts in the Citizenship Education theme. Then, they considered the contents through which the learners will learn about the subject concepts and develop the subject competencies in an orderly manner.

This process of curriculum integration has continued with the actual designing of the Electoral Education Curriculum using the NERDC usual template, its infusion into the National Values Curriculum, critique, editorial works, and possible production of relevant resource materials as well as the orientation of the end-users. The curriculum is designed to instil democratic values, respect, and acceptance of others in the learners at a young age. It is premised on the conviction that interacting with the infused curriculum will help them enter adulthood with the ideas to be internalized and promote a greater awareness of civic responsibility and participation in civic and electoral processes.

The efforts of IFES and NERDC so far toward the integration of the Electoral Education Curriculum into the National Values Curriculum can thus be described as a reflection of the initiators' firm conviction that there are fundamental connections between the Nigerian nation's political arrangements and its educational efforts on behalf of the growing young ones. This is quite laudable and can be taken as an educational narrative that can go a long way in significantly influencing the political behavior of the Nigerian electorate positively toward the preservation of the nation's democratic principles.

6. The Importance of the Infusion Efforts in the Preservation of Democratic Principles

According to Ibeanu and Orji (2014) & Push News (2023), over one million votes cast in the Nigerian presidential election of April 2011 were rejected during counting, mainly because the ballots were wrongly marked. They observed that although the rejected votes constitute only 3.2% of all votes cast in that election, several other observers noted that the number is relatively high and could have

been markedly lower if voters received adequate voter education, which incidentally is one of the ultimate goals of the Electoral Education Curriculum.

This Day newspaper (2021) also identified another issue being faced by election process in Nigeria as it reported that INEC itself revealed that, based on analysis of the most recent national elections as well as various state and local contests in recent years, preliminary studies indicate the average voter participation rate across Nigeria has typically ranged from 30-35%, suggesting there is still opportunity to further engage Nigerian citizens in the electoral process. While turnout varies somewhat between different types of elections and geographic regions, overall it appears more can be done to motivate and enable more of the population to exercise their democratic right to vote. However, Ojetunde (2019) reported through the International Centre for Investigative Reporters (ICIR), that Nigeria still had the lowest rate in 2019 elections and among the African countries in recent times.

These problems of rejected ballots and declining turnout at elections have been widely attributed directly and indirectly to inadequate civic and voter education. Thus, introducing Electoral Education into the school curriculum is expected to strengthen citizens' participation and active involvement in elections in Nigeria. The Infusion of Electoral Education into the National Values Curriculum in a democratic dispensation is, therefore, very germane at the basic education level. The conviction is that when children attain the voting age, they will already understand the basis of the national and local political and electoral systems. They would have, therefore, been better prepared to become active and responsible electorates. The infusion is equally pivotal to sustainable democracy and the guaranteeing of political accountability and stability towards national development.

The acquisition of electoral education knowledge and the development of the needed positive attitude by the youth will significantly assist the future election administration in delivering participatory, free, fair, and efficient elections. It will equally lay a foundation for developing the background attitude, behavior, and required knowledge that can stimulate and consolidate the preservation of democratic principles in the growing youth. Effective delivery of an Electoral Education-infused National Values Curriculum can also make the youth less sceptical and apathetic about elections and election matters as they grow up. They are likely to participate more actively as political participation has been identified "as an essential and primary instrument for measuring the quality of a country's democracy (Putra, 2018).

Furthermore, the infusion of Electoral Education into the National Values Curriculum at the basic education level will make the learners become active citizens who are more active as individuals and groups that can influence government decision-making in a democratic country. With its effective delivery

in the classroom, complemented by hands-on exercises, the entrenchment and promotion of democratic culture will be assured among the growing youth.

7. The Curriculum Infusion Initiators' Expectations from the Implementers for the Preservation of Democratic Principles

Previous research by Molosiwa (2010) found that successfully integrating civic education lessons into different subject areas demands substantial planning and pedagogical training for instructors to feel prepared and accomplish infusion objectives effectively. It involves the integration of some contents and skills into existing courses in a manner that focuses on those contents (and skills) without jeopardizing the integrity of the courses themselves.

It implies that effective delivery of the Electoral Education-infused National Values Curriculum requires some help from the teachers who implement it. They require assistance to successfully mediate the infused curriculum and develop a new attitude towards learning and embracing innovation. This position is based on the conviction that educators must be guardians of our democratic principles, and the fight to safeguard Nigerian democracy should begin in the classrooms and our schools.

This assistance should focus on achieving long-term goals related to the professional development and training of significant teachers who implement the curriculum so that their technical capacity for handling curriculum insertion or integration is improved, as Electoral Education is being mainstreamed into the National Values Curriculum at the basic education level. Extensive professional development is needed for the teachers who will be charged with implementing the infused curriculum. The implementation will require a significant intervention of some weeks of knowledge development and pedagogical preparation in skill acquisition in the new curriculum content area (in this case, the Electoral Education), other than the one they are already certified to teach (Civic Education or/and Social Studies in the National Values Curriculum).

Changing to an infused curriculum requires systematic reforms. These will be how the teachers of the National Values Curriculum and related disciplines are prepared, certified and assessed. Such a change has implications for teacher preparation in training institutions, like Colleges of Education, Universities and Faculties of Education. Curriculum content, methodology and modes of assessment must be reviewed in line with the design and details of the infused curriculum so that teachers can, on graduation, effectively deliver the curriculum and contribute significantly to the realization of the purpose of infusion.

The in-service teachers and schools must do much to facilitate the acquisition of sustained democratic skills to become more familiar with the concepts recommended for infusion into the Civic Education theme of the National Values Curriculum. The teachers charged with implementing the infused

curriculum must be ready for active involvement in the harmonization and curriculum restructuring process.

Teachers on their own are expected to seek opportunities for professional development. They must become regular collectors of relevant information and real-life democratic experiences that can be used to drive effective learning and promote democratic principles in the learners in their course of infusion. Through their teachers, schools should prepare the learners to be active participants in a democracy because the teachers are primarily responsible for ensuring that the infused curriculum is effectively presented to the learners.

Furthermore, the teachers and publishers must consider developing relevant instructional resource materials, like textbooks, audio-visual aids, and materials on Electoral Education, in conjunction with curriculum development agencies like NERDC and external support agencies like IFES. The newly infused electoral education concepts require content expansion in the textbooks and resource materials.

Teachers' commitment to the conscious and deliberate infusion is essential to the preceding discourse. They are expected to actively review and select highly engaging enrichment-based activities related to particular topics, inject them into the curriculum to make the subjects more interesting, and provide support and encouragement for individuals and small groups who want to extend their pursuit of the enrichment activities. They also need to embrace and democratise teaching practices by including techniques that give learners' voices a chance to be heard in the teacher's curriculum delivery strategies.

Despite all these highlighted expectations, it is essential to share some findings that reveal the possible challenges that could constrain the teachers' role in the infusion process. For instance, Molosiwa's study (2010) demonstrated that even though the curriculum blueprint clearly states that emerging issues should be infused into the different subject areas, only some teachers infused them in Botswana senior secondary schools. There were varied views on infusion. She reported that some teachers could infuse the issues while others failed.

The main reason for the lack of infusion was that teachers needed to learn how to approach infusion. Many expressed that while educators were supportive of enhancing civic studies with contemporary topics, some voiced that introducing the updated syllabus requiring infusion came with challenges. As no complimentary seminars were arranged to onboard instructors on appropriate integration methods, it appears the decision-makers presumed existing comprehension of blending class work and topics, though supplemental expertise could have facilitated smoother adoption of the revised approach. Teachers also reported that the authorities needed to provide appropriate resources to make implementing the infusion issue easier. The teachers felt poorly prepared to infuse

emerging issues in their course content, although they claimed to be infusing such material in their courses.

Thus, this can make some schools and teachers depend on textbooks that may not align with the infused curriculum, particularly the Electoral Education contents. The lack of competent teachers can also constitute a severe problem for attaining the goals of the infused curriculum. According to Falade and Adeyemi (2015), despite the recent emphasis on teaching values and civic skills in Nigerian schools, teachers still face the challenge of effective instruction delivery. Most secondary school teachers need more competence in value-related teaching methods and evaluation strategies. They use conventional methods, which could be more effective in enabling learners to develop and manifest national values and skills.

Proper in-service teacher education can help decrease this knowledge gap up to a certain level. However, if not well integrated into the implementation plan, the effectiveness of this may affect the realization of the goals and objectives of infusing Electoral Education into the Nigerian school system.

8. Conclusion

The curriculum plays a significant role in disseminating information and skills and changing people's attitudes. This paper, therefore, affirms the need to use education as a tool to get the young ones to understand and adapt to the ever-changing political arena of Nigeria so that the youth can grow with a solid foundation capable of making them more active in demanding a voice in the way they are governed. This view is based on the author's solid belief in the critical role of education and participation of the electorate in elections as being crucial to the survival and sustenance of democracy.

However, there is a need for both prior to service and in-service training for teachers on the infusion of emerging issues like the Electoral Education already inserted into the appropriate sections of the National Values curriculum content. Hence, nurturing a sense of citizenship is fundamental to building sustainable democracies, and infusing Electoral Education into a relevant national curriculum like the National Values will go a long way in contributing to this laudable goal. This, however, is on the proviso that the designers and those who implement it are mindful of all that is needed to drive the successful implementation of an infused curriculum.

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