

SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON CIVIC DISPOSITIONS IN EKITI STATE, NIGERIA

Margaret Folu OLUWAGBOHUNMI Ph.D

Department of Social Science Education, Faculty of Education, Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT

DOI URL: <https://doi.org/10.36713/epra2976>

This study was conducted to assess secondary school students' perception of civic dispositions in Ekiti State. The study adopted descriptive research design of the survey type. Population of the study consisted of 208,956 secondary school students while the sample consisted of 1200 Senior Secondary School II and III students selected through multi-stage sampling procedure. One research question and two research hypotheses were raised for the study. A self-constructed questionnaire titled "Students' Perception of Civic Disposition Questionnaire" (SPCDQ) was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by Social Studies experts while reliability test conducted using test retest method yielded 0.77 coefficients. Findings of the study revealed that secondary school students perspectives on civic disposition was positive and that exhibition of traits such as avoidance of abusive arguments, obeying laws of the land, love of the country, loyalty to the principles of democracy, tolerating others for peaceful coexistence and speaking the truth are required for democratic system of government to thrive. Based on the findings it was recommended among others that students should be encouraged to always demonstrate civic dispositions and participate in political discussions, show respect for national identity and participate actively in community service as ways to eschew anti-democratic activities.

KEY WORDS: *Civic dispositions, secondary school students, perspectives, democratic value, political participation.*

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a country with large population and series of social, economic, religious and political challenges. Elections are greeted with political thuggery, violence, political killings, destruction of lives and properties among others. Without any doubt these problems have affected the people negatively in several ways and have hindered national development. Unfortunately, youths are perpetrators of most of the crimes. The rate at which youths are involved in crimes especially political thuggery and violence is alarming. This can be attributed to unemployment and poverty. Odotola (2014) posited that Nigeria has a very large youth population that is presently unengaged, unemployed, untrained and unskilled to positively contribute meaningfully to the prosperity and growth of the nation. Odotola (2014) further stressed that the unemployment situation has created a breeding ground for largely unengaged youths to serve as willing hands for perpetrators of political and economic violence which is presently spreading all across the nation.

The values of love, honesty, patriotism, peace and unity that are embedded in the national anthem and pledge and are necessary for sustenance of democratic system of government and peaceful coexistence of the people seem to have been replaced with politics of bitterness, election rigging, thuggery, political killings, money politics, political god fatherism etc. Due to unemployment and poverty, the youths are susceptible to being used for various nefarious activities by the political class. Youths are used for distribution of money at polling centres, manipulation of voter registers manipulation of election results, diversion of electoral materials, snatching of ballot boxes, causing confusion and riot in order to disrupt electoral process. Aside from unemployment and poverty, these unpatriotic acts of the youths can also be attributed to lack of democratic value, low level of political education, poor knowledge of what democracy stands for and inadequate knowledge of the electoral process. For the young ones to be effectively and positively involved in political matters now and when they become adults, they must perceive civic dispositions as ingredients necessary for sustenance of democracy and demonstrate them.

Civic dispositions are positive habits that are socially acceptable and essential for democratic system of government to thrive. Civic dispositions are traits essential for democratic character formation and the maintenance of constitutional democracy. According to Awoniyi and Francis (2014) civic dispositions are defined as the citizen traits necessary for a democracy (e.g. tolerance, public spiritedness, civility, critical mindedness and willingness to listen, negotiate and compromise). Owen (2015) described civic dispositions as habits or characters of citizens that are conducive or helpful to the healthy functioning and common good of a democratic system. In the United States, civic dispositions are guidelines on how to be better citizens, to develop confidence to be able to participate in civic activities, to help to understand roles, rights and responsibilities that are associated with government, to show civil ways to be open, tolerant and responsible in exercising rights and responsibilities (Civic Dispositions, 2016).

Youths need to develop democratic values, positive attitudes and acquire skills and knowledge desirable for them to be able to participate effectively in political matters and electoral processes. This is a role expected of parents, teachers, government and even religious institutions. The bulk of the work rests on teachers who are saddled with the responsibility of teaching, guiding and giving the youths formal instructions while in school on how to become effective citizens and participate positively and meaningfully in electoral process. In order to achieve these objectives, social studies was included in the national school curriculum. When it appeared the objectives are not being achieved by social studies, civic education was introduced into the school system as a compulsory subject from JSS to SSS classes few years ago. The students, having taken the subject up to the final year have started writing senior school certificate examination on civics education. By implication, the students acquire knowledge, skills and values that are necessary for democratic society to thrive through civic education. Branson and Quigley (2006) argued that civic education is an important component of education that cultivates citizens to participate in the public life of a democracy, to use their rights and to discharge their responsibilities with the necessary knowledge and skills while Awoniyi and Francis (2014) found that teachers and pupils perceived civic education as highly effective in the development of learners' civic disposition.

With this development, it is expected that students (who form large percentage of youths that participate in democratic society after living secondary school) acquire knowledge, civic skills and develop traits that will make them understand what democracy stands for, know that in politics, one either wins or loses and that politics should not be a do or die affair. Branson and Quigley (1998) maintained that participation must be based on informed, critical reflection and on the understanding and acceptance of the rights and responsibilities that go with membership of the community. The student must understand what right attitudes and wrong attitudes are and must be prepared to contribute positively to community and national growth. The National Council for the Social Studies (2013) added that students who leave high school with civic competencies achieved through high quality civic learning practices are more likely to vote and discuss politics at home, to volunteer and work on community issues and are more confident in their ability to speak publicly and communicate with their elected representatives. The students

should come to the realization that democratic self-government means that citizens are actively involved in their own governance and that they do not have to just passively accept the dictums of others or acquiesce to their demands' acquisition of civic disposition indicated that civics instruction is positively related to students' development of civic dispositions. Guilfoile and Delander (2014) also submitted that the students having gone through series of contents related to democracy need to practice what they have been taught.

Civic dispositions identified by the Center for Civic Education (2016) include civility, respect, individual responsibility, self-discipline, civic-mindedness, open-mindedness, compromise, toleration of diversity, patience and persistence, compassion, generosity, and loyalty to the nation and its principles. The National Standards for Civic and Government (2016) highlighted civic dispositions that contribute to the political efficacy of the individual and healthy functioning of the political system as patriotism, civility, civic mindedness, respect for the right of others, compassion, honesty, respect of the law, open mindedness, negotiation and compromise, critical thinking, persistence, tolerance of ambiguity and courage. Perception of civic dispositions can be determined by a student's gender. Observation shows that male students (youths) are usually involved when it comes to thuggery and violent acts. Apart from the fact that male youths are always mobilized and enticed with money by male, politicians, they also read protests, cause mayhem and unleash terror on people. Students from low socio-economic background are likely to be more involved in antidemocratic acts such as thuggery and violence because of poverty and unemployment than their counterparts from high socio-economic background who by assumption do not lack good things of life.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite the civic knowledge, skills and attitude believed to have been acquired by secondary school students through social studies and civic education, observations 'have shown that students do not demonstrate civic dispositions that are expected of them such as patriotism, honesty, compassion, civic mindedness, respect for the law

and civility. It appears dishonesty, disobedience, lack of respect for the laws of the land, lack of compassion and unpatriotic attitudes have become part of the students. This seems to be the reason some of them are easily enticed with financial gains

and incited' to be used for negative activities that endanger democratic process. As a result of the financial gains, youths appear to engage in distribution of money at polling centres, manipulation of voter registers, manipulation of election results, diversion of electoral materials, snatching of ballot boxes, causing confusion, riot and violence in order to disrupt electoral process. These activities show the students' inability to demonstrate civic dispositions. It is on' this background that this study was conducted to determine perception of civic dispositions by secondary school students in Ekiti state.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to determine secondary school students' perspectives on civic dispositions by secondary school students in Ekiti state. The study also sought' to find out if secondary school students' perception of civic dispositions would be influenced by their sex and socio-economic background.

RESEARCH QUESTION

One research question was raised for the study:

1. What is secondary school students' perception of civic dispositions in Ekiti State?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The following research hypotheses were generated for the study:

1. There is no significant gender difference in perception of civic dispositions by secondary school students.
2. There is no significant difference in perception of civic dispositions by secondary school students from low and high socio-economic background.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted descriptive design of the survey type. The population consisted of 208,956 secondary school students in Ekiti State. The sample was made up of 1200 II and III students. Multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select the sample. Two local government areas from each of the three senatorial districts that make up Ekiti State were first selected through simple random sampling. Four secondary schools were randomly selected from each local government headquarters. From each school, 50 students were selected through simple random sampling technique making a total of 1200 students. The reason for selecting SS II and III students is because they are

close to graduation and will soon join the teeming population of youths that play active role in electoral process.

A self-constructed questionnaire titled "Students' Perception of Civic Disposition Questionnaire" (SPCDQ) was used for data collection. The instrument was divided into two sections. Section A elicited bio-data information of the respondents such as gender and parents' socio-economic status while section B contained items on civic dispositions as perceived by secondary school students. The instrument was validated by social studies experts while reliability test was conducted. Using test retest method, the instrument was administered twice on 30 students outside the sample. Data collected from the two administrations were analysed with Pearson Product Moment Correlation; the result of which yielded 0.77 coefficients. This was considered high enough for the study. Copies of the questionnaire were later administered on the respondents in each school with the help of some teachers who served as research assistants. Data collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The only research question was analysed with frequency counts and percentages while the hypotheses generated were analysed using student t-test. All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Research Question: What is secondary school students' perception of civic dispositions in Ekiti State?

Table 1: Descriptive analysis of secondary school students' perspectives on civic dispositions in Ekiti State

S/N	Items	Agree		Disagree	
		Freq	%	Freq.	%
1.	Speaking the truth without fear	885	73.7	315	26.3
2.	Honesty is necessary for democracy to thrive	766	63.8	434	36.2
3.	Attending enlightenment programmes	521	43.4	679	56.6
4.	Participation in political discussions	93	07.7	1107	92.3
5.	Obedience to rules and regulations guiding electoral process	1015	84.5	185	15.5
6.	Obedience to laws of the land	520	43.1	680	56.7
7.	Respect for the views of other people	733	61	467	39
8.	Avoidance of abusive arguments that can fuel violence	1134	94.5	66	5.5
9.	Tolerating others is necessary for peaceful co-existence	945	78.7	255	21.3
10.	Love of the country	973	81	227	19
11.	Respect for national identity (anthem, pledge and others)	243	20.2	957	79.8
12.	Loyalty to principles of democracy	948	79	252	21
13.	Offering community service to make society better	309	25.7	891	74.3
14.	Active involvement in community service	315	26.3	885	73.7

Table 1 shows that 1134 (94.5%), 1015 (84.5%) and 973 (81%) of the respondents agreed that avoidance of abusive arguments that can fuel violence, obedience to rules and regulations guiding electoral process and love of the country respectively were perceived as civic dispositions required for democracy to thrive. Nine hundred and forty-eight (79%), 945 (78.7%) and 885 (73.7%) of the respondents also perceived loyalty to the principles of democracy, tolerating others for peaceful coexistence and speaking the truth to be important factors for effective democracy respectively.

However, participation in political discussions (92.3%), respect for national identity (79.8%) and offering community service (74.3%) were not perceived as factors necessary for democratic process by the students.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant sex difference in secondary school students' perspectives on civic dispositions in Ekiti State.

Table 2: t-test analysis showing civic dispositions as perceived by male and female secondary school students in Ekiti State.

Sex	N	Mean	Sd	Df	t-cal	Decision
Male Students	543	34.71	21.42	1198	2.301	Sig.
Female Students	657	25.83	17.90			

Table 2 reveals that there is significant sex difference in secondary school students' perspectives on civic dispositions ($t_{-cal} -2.301$; $p = 0.000 < 0.005$). The hypothesis which states that there is no significant sex difference in secondary school students' perspectives on civic dispositions is therefore not accepted.

Table 3: t-test analysis showing civic dispositions as perceived by students from low and high socio-economic background

Variables	N	Mean	Sd	Df	t-cal	Decision
Students from low Socio-economic background	781	18.33	12.61	1198	3.071	Sig.
Students from high Socio-economic background	419	14.15	9.50			

Table 3 shows that there is significant difference in secondary school students' perspectives on civic dispositions based on their socio-economic background ($t_{-cal} -3.071$; $p = 0.000 < 0.005$). The hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in perception of civic dispositions by students from low and high socio-economic background is therefore not accepted.

DISCUSSION

The finding of this study has revealed that the students had positive perception of civic dispositions. Most of the students perceived avoidance of abusive arguments, obedience to laws of the land, love of the country, loyalty to the principles of democracy, tolerating others for peaceful coexistence and speaking the truth as factors required for democratic system of government to thrive. This can be attributed to the knowledge acquired through social studies and civic education as supported by the findings of Awoniyi and Francis (2014) that teachers and pupils perceived civic education as highly effective in the development of learners' civic disposition. That their actions and attitudes as youths after graduation at times negate these civic dispositions during elections can be attributed to poverty and unemployment problem being experienced in the country. As the saying goes that 'devil finds work for an idle hand', most of the youths are lured into anti-democratic activities such as political thuggery and violence because of financial gains. This agrees with the submission of Odutola (2014) that the unemployment situation has created a breeding ground for largely unengaged youths to serve as willing hands for perpetrators of political and economic violence. The negative attitude of the youths can also be as a result of inability of political leaders in the country to show good examples. What the youths learn from the leaders and they like to demonstrate is disobedience to the laws of the land, involvement in abusive arguments that usually fuel violence, lack of love for the country, disloyalty to the principles of democracy, inability to tolerate one another as well as corruption of the highest order and dishonesty among others.

However, it is not surprising that most of the students did not see participation in political discussions, respect for national identity (anthem, pledge etc) and offering community services as civic dispositions necessary for democratic process. This is due to the fact that the students may not see any

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in secondary school students' perspectives on civic dispositions based on their socio-economic background.

relevance of participation in political discussions and respect for national identity to making democracy work in Nigeria. Apart from this, most adult Nigerians are not always interested in offering community services. There is the general belief that everything must be done by government. At times, effort of few enlightened members of the community to organise community service in order to relieve suffering of the people and make society better usually meet with stiff resistance.

The study also revealed that there was significant gender difference in perception of civic dispositions by the students. It is understandable that male students perceived civic dispositions differently from the female students because they are mostly and usually involved in most of the negative acts. It is not common to see girls being involved in violent acts or being recruited as political thugs. Students from low socio-economic background also had different perception of civic dispositions. The reason for this is that unemployed youths and those with poor background are the ones lured into anti-democratic behaviours by the politicians. It is therefore not unexpected that their perception would be different.

CONCLUSION

From the findings of this study, it can be concluded that most of the students perceived avoidance of abusive arguments, obeying laws of the land, love of the country, loyalty to the principles of democracy, tolerating others for peaceful coexistence and speaking the truth as traits necessary for effective democracy. This is an indication that the students had positive perception of civic dispositions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Since students have positive perception of civic dispositions, they should be encouraged to always demonstrate them;
2. Effort should be made by teachers and parents to ensure that students are encouraged to participate in political discussions, show respect for national identity and participate actively in community service;
3. Government should provide employment for the teeming unemployed youths so as to reduce poverty and discourage them from being recruited for anti-democratic activities.

REFERENCES

1. Awoniyi, S. A. & Francis, I. Z. (2014). Perceptions of teachers and learners on the effectiveness of civic education in the development of civic competency among learners in Chipata district, Zambia. *European Scientific Journal* March 2014 Edition.10 (7), pp 425-434.
2. Branson, M.S & Quigley, C.N. (1998). The role of civic education. Available at www.Z.gwu.edu/ccps/pop-civ.html
3. Branson, M.S. & Quigley, C. N. (2006). The role of civic education. Centre for Civic Education, Calabasas. 46. Available at <http://books.google.com.pk/books?id=22zEGwAAAJ&dq=The+Role+of+Civic+Edu>
4. Civic Dispositions (2016). What is civic disposition? Retrieved from civicdisposition.spb.yolasite.com on 23/10/2016.
5. Guilfoile, L. & Delander, B. (2014). Guidebook: Six Proven Practices for Effective Civic Learning. National Centre for Learning and Civic Engagement. Education Commission of the States. www.ecs.org/.../six-proven-practices-for-effective-civic-learning Accessed 17/11/2016.
6. Milner, H. (2006). CIRCLE working paper #60: The informed political participation of young Canadians and Americans. <http://www.civicyouth.org/POQ/WorkingPapersfWP60Milner.pdf> Accessed 09/11/2016.
7. National Council for The Social Studies (2013). Revitalizing civic learning in our schools position Statement approved for 2013. www.sosan.org. Accessed 07/12/2016.
8. National Standards for Civic and Government (2016). Demonstrating civic dispositions: why must we demonstrate CIVIC dispositions? civicdispositions.spb.yolasite.com/demonstrating-civic-dispositions.php.
9. Odotola (2014). Building a Better, Stronger and United Nigeria. *The Punch*, 11th March, 25.
10. Owen, D. (2015). High school students' acquisition of civic dispositions: The impact of 'We the People'. www.researchgate.net/publications/279941602-high-school...Accessed 23/10/2016.
11. Technical Report (July, 2015). High school students' acquisition of civic disposition: The Impact of we the People'. Georgetown University. www.civiced.org/impactofwethepeople .Accessed 17/11/2016.