INCLUSIVE VOTER EDUCATION THROUGH ADULT AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION: ADDRESSING OBSTACLES TO NIGERIA'S ELECTORAL PROCESS

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Abstract

This paper is a discussion on the need for addressing vote buying as an obstacle to electoral process in Nigeria through inclusive non-formal voter education. The study was necessitated by observing the rate of money politics scourge played by Nigerian adults and politicians and how the problem is affecting developmental decision and policy making in Nigerian. Vis-à-vis efforts made by the electoral authorities and security agencies to eliminate the menace, but the challenge is still persisting in the polity taking different dimensions. Education in form of adult education or any kind of enlightenment directly or indirectly to change adult voter perception or attitude by a professional adult and non-formal education expert in support of credible, free and fair electoral process could be defined as voter education. This is a specialized responsibility of professional adult and non-formal educators, because changing adult attitude requires professionalism. The paper reviewed the concept of voter education, adult education, vote buying, inclusive voter education, mechanisms for inclusive voter education and other key aspects of voter education. It was concluded that, inclusive voter education should be organized and implemented in collaboration with professional adult educators to ensure efficiency and effectiveness. The study also recommended that, INEC should collaborate with adult and non-formal education professionals to regularly educate voters i.e. voter education should not be during elections only but frequently and effectively and less emphasis shall be given to media and other indirect means of voter education but face to face education.

Keywords: Inclusive Voter, Adult, and Non-formal Education, in Electoral Process

Introduction

Electoral process has been a serious problem in Nigeria before and after the introduction of card reader machine, either we like it or not, the problem is from Nigerians not the system. To reduce the lingering challenge in Nigerian elections, there is need to behaviorally change Nigerians attitudes and perception on elections through an inclusive non-formal voter education. Voter education is one of the mechanisms required for ensuring adequate and effective preparations for acceptable and credible elections particularly in countries like Nigeria where the rate of poverty, hunger and illiteracy are hindering the progress of democracy base on the fact that, majority of the voters cannot give you any tangible reason for voting a contestant, couple with selfishness on both voters and politicians sides that makes some voters to sale their votes in exchange with money or goods. Similarly, voter education is meant to facilitate election administration so as to deliver free, fair, efficient and cost-effective election.

During elections, educated voters usually strive to ensure effective organization and patriotism by citizens. They behave and support behaviors that are appropriate and supportive to a peaceful election, acceptance of results and tolerance to the competitive nature of election and pressure from oppositions. An educated citizenry and well educated or enlightened voter can easily overcome election shortcomings or challenges and ensure peaceful, free and fair conduct of elections (Election Commission of India, 2016).

An inclusive non-formal voter education is a specially organized, smart, brief and sustainable enlightenment for the entire voters in a country irrespective of geographical location, education, civilization, occupation and economic status and otherwise for the sake of harmonizing the entire voters' mindset, thought and perception to ensure free, fair, acceptable and credible election by applying the global best practices for election. An inclusive non-formal voter education could influence an electoral system by ensuring inclusive, informed all encompassing and ethical electoral participation by all citizens, identify and emphasize the roles that different stakeholders should play, scrutinize challenges related to voter education and the electoral process itself and provide solutions to the identified challenges before the actual elections (Schaffer, 2006).

It has been identified by Young African Leaders Initiative (2019) that there is vote buying and selling, which is not without consequences. Schaffer (2006) have identified lack of voter education on the part of the electorates. As such the authors tried to address vote buying as an obstacle to electoral process in Nigeria through inclusive non-formal voter education.

Conceptual Framework

Voter Education

Education in form of adult education or any kind of enlightenment directly or indirectly to change adult voter perception or attitude by a professional adult and non-formal education in support of credible, free and fair electoral process could be defined as voter education. Where by voter is considered as the main target. There are numerous aspects of voter education that are required if an election would be efficiently prepared and successfully planned. Although these might be variously conducted by political parties and/or electoral body or both may do so. Voter education is usually identified as a function of the electoral authority and is occasionally subcontracted by the authorities to private companies and civil society organizations in some countries, while other countries feel like is a waste of resources and rely on international NGOs to do it for them (Graham, 2006).

Voter education encompasses the basic information and orientation that every voter need before going to the polling station to vote on voting days. It sensitizes electorates on the importance of participation in elections and provides background attitudes, behaviors, and knowledge among citizens that stimulate and consolidate democratic processes in a country.

Voter education is an enterprise between electoral authorities, political parties and voters to ensure that voters are adequately ready, willing, behaviorally set up to be patriotic and able to participate in an election and ensure free, fare, hitch free and acceptable election. This entails voter literacy and confidence that, the electoral process is efficient and effective to select a Government and promote programmes and policies that will benefit the individual voter at last.

Voter education is necessary in ensuring that every voter can effectively exercise his/her voting right and express their political will through the electoral process. If voters were not prepared or motivated (educated) to participate in the electoral process, then questions may arise about the legitimacy, representativeness, and responsiveness of elected leaders and institutions. At the same time, voter education is a much focused function in elections. It targeted eligible voters and addresses specific electoral events and challenges as well as the general electoral process. While voter education is a necessary component of the democratic electoral process, it is not sufficient for democracy. Voter education needs to be supplemented with civic education efforts in order to achieve the democratic participation and culture that flows, in fact, the rationale for periodic elections. Certainly, participation in elections and the status of "voter" have a special weight in transitional countries holding founding elections and where the right to vote has been obtained through social struggle. It was put forward by Storm (1996) that the democratic world moves toward a universal franchise, however, voting is viewed as one of the many ways in which citizens participate in and support democracy.

Vote Buying

Vote Buying is a widespread challenge in Nigerian elections that is usually viewed as a purely economic exchange or means of income in which the voter sells his or her vote in exchange with goods or cash to the highest bidder among the contesting political parties. Schaffer (2002) has observed that this is a problem known to all Nigerians, but some of the stakeholders use to pretend as they have never experienced it before or have an idea about it. Not knowing that, they are deceiving themselves.

Causes of Vote Selling and Buying in Nigeria

It was observed by Onuoha and Ojo (2018) that several factors contribute to the rise in vote buying during election in Nigeria some of the factors responsible for this disaster include but not limited to the following:

- 1. **Corruption**: during elections majority of the citizens ranging from academicians including myself as a student, security, politicians, voters are all expecting what they may gain from the elections either lawfully or unlawfully as a result they can compromised anything for the sake of money.
- 2. **Poverty:** this is inescapably one of the foremost causes for vote selling in Nigeria, particularly when associated with illiteracy. Nigeria has one of the highest extreme poverty populations in the world as at June 2018 with over 87 million or nearly 50% of its estimated 180 million populations living below the poverty line that is one Dollar per day. Poverty is particularly heightened in rural areas and among female-headed households, making many people susceptible to selling their votes for immediate gratification.
- 3. **Introduction of card readers:** using electronic devices to read biometric voter identity cards and electronic tracking of electoral materials has reduced the then method of rigging elections in Nigeria. Hence, politicians have come to realized that falsification of election results in order to emerge winners is becoming counter-productive, especially as the judiciary has also annulled many rigged elections. They have therefore resorted into buying voters with money, foodstuffs, clothes and other forms of goods in exchange for their votes.

- 4. **Nigerian politicians are so desperate to be in power:** politicians tried to win elections at all costs trying both the possible and impossible means to win elections. As such they used to engage themselves in vote buying because of the promise of enormous power and wealth they hope to gain once they enter government in addition with the fear that, if they did not buy votes their opponents will buy to win them in the election.
- 5. **States monthly support to security agencies**: this is seriously contributing to the menace of vote buying by politicians and the security has being rendered handicaps because the Government at either state or Federal has interests that security agencies cannot tempered with. As such they used to support vote buying and expect their own share during elections.
- 6. **Compromise by security agents and poll officials:** during elections the first person to be persuaded by politicians are the security agents. When security has compromised what can an armless individual do beside he/she relies on the security protection. These usually determined vote buying and other offences.



Voters showing ballots to politicians to claim their deals. Source: (Onuoha & Ojo, 2018).

Consequences of Vote Buying and selling in Nigeria

Young African Leaders Initiatives (2019) have identified that vote buying and selling in an election can result to the following consequences:

- 1. Leadership will turn to an enterprise because elected office holders must retrieve their capital invested in elections before taken care of citizens needs and interests.
- 2. Corruption will be indirectly legalized by elected office holders.
- 3. There will be unpatriotic leadership.
- 4. Citizens will lose confidence in the government.
- 5. Poor economic development or down fall.
- 6. Obstructs the entire democratic process by interfering with the rights of citizens to freely decide who will represent them and their interests

7. It enables poor governance and undercuts citizens' ability to hold their elected leaders accountable.

Factors That May Determine Voter Education

The scope of voter education needed in any given country depend on a variety of factors, as pointed out by Namibia Institute for Democracy (2007):

- i. Does the country have functional security measures that can be applied on anyone that uses money in elections?
- ii. Does the country have a long history of democratic elections, or is this a founding or transitional election?
- iii. Is voter registration mandatory or voluntary?
- iv. Who is responsible for voter registration?
- v. Has the franchise been extended to include new groups of voters?
- vi. Are there changes in the system of representation or the voting process?
- vii. Does the electoral process and political institutions enjoy the confidence of the electorate?
- viii. Is the election campaign open and competitive?
 - ix. Have voter education efforts been undertaken in the past?
 - x. Is there an on-going effective civic education effort?

Responses to the above questions and more factors will determine the nature and scope of voter education programme needed in a particular country.

Voter education is a responsibility of both election authorities and civil society organizations either national or international organizations. A variety of other government agencies may also have some roles to play to educate voters. The specific roles of the election authority or other government agencies may be determined by the election law, while civil society organizations may have, as part of their mission, a commitment to voter education and citizen political participation.

Election

Election is the formal and globally accepted process of selecting a person or political party to occupy a public office or process of accepting or rejecting a political proposition by citizens through voting. Democratic elections in Nigeria usually involve political parties to present their aspirants to the public to seek for their vote. Elections in Nigeria are usually organized and conducted by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) with the goal of giving citizens the right and opportunity to freely and credibly select their leaders by themselves. It involve screening of the aspirants from party level up to INEC, when an aspirant was successfully screened at all the levels, he/she will then be subjected to the citizens to select their choice freely, voluntarily without any fair or favour (Wikipedia.org).

Non-formal Education

Non-formal education is an objectively organized programme and processes for children or adults with the aim of improving a range of behaviors, skills and competences, outside the formal educational system either using a medium or at a particular location. Nonformal education should also be voluntary and cater for people of all ages. it may be short in duration and/or low intensity, and it is typically provided in the form of short courses, workshops or seminars. Non-formal education encompasses various structured educational systems which might not either have curriculum, syllabus, accreditation and certification, but more organized and structured than informal education which typically takes place naturally.

Examples of non-formal education include integrated almajiri education, workshop for workers or for a special purpose, trainings, community-based sports programs, and programs developed by organizations such as the Boy Scouts, the Girl Guides, community adult education courses, sports or fitness programs, professional conference style seminars, and continuing professional development programs, radio and television programmes, mobile cinema programmes. The learner's objectives may be to increase skills and knowledge couple with behavior modification.

The formal education system is inadequate to effectively meet the needs of the individual and the society particular in countries like Nigeria. The need to offer more and better education at all levels and for all, to a growing number of people, particularly in developing countries, the scant success of current formal education systems to meet all such demands, has shown the need to develop alternatives to education (Alan, 2007).

Characteristics of Non-formal Education

The basic features of an effective non-formal education programme, as put forward by Alan (2007) are thus; learning may take place in a variety of locations and at any time.; relevant and attractive to the needs of the target group; organized for specific category of people and purpose; focused on clearly defined purpose and flexibility in organization, implementation and delivery.

Objectives of Non-formal Education

Non-formal education system is always planned and implemented to achieve the following objectives, as highlighted by Alan (2007):

- i. To provide functional literacy and access to continuing education for adults and youths who have not had a formal education or did not complete their primary education.
- ii. To provide functional and remedial education for children and adults who did not complete their secondary education to get access to formal education system.
- iii. To provide basic and specific training to different categories of workers and graduates to improve their basic knowledge and skills.
- iv. To provide in-service, on-the-job, vocational and professional training to different categories of workers and professionals to improve their skills and knowledge to become up-to-date.
- v. To give adult citizens the necessary cultural and civic education for public enlightenment and community development.

Inclusive Non-formal Voter Education

Inclusive Non-Formal Voter Education refers to voter education opportunity that every citizen must be provided with as a right without discrimination based on distinctions of literacy rates, ethnicity, sex, language, religion, political or other perspectives, national or social origin, property, geographical location, distance from cities, birth and other aspects and without unreasonable restrictions to anyone among the entire citizens of the concerned nation. This implies to the fact that an opportunity should be provided for basic comprehensive and shortened means to smartly, efficiently and professionally educate voters in every part of the country irrespective of their status or location (Election Commission of India 2016). This must be professionally carried out because teaching adults is not by force but persuading and flexibility.

Objectives of Inclusive Voter Education

The main objectives of Inclusive voter education programme shall include but not limited to the following:

- i. To inclusively educate voters using the global best practices for election towards promoting inclusive, informed and ethical electoral participation identify and emphasize the roles that different stakeholders can play, investigate challenges related to voter education and provide ways to tackle the challenges.
- ii. To tactically and professionally impart electoral literacy through curricula and extra-curricular activities to every adult citizen irrespective economic status, social status, political, literacy status and geographical location using various means depending on the interest of the locality.
- iii. To apply all the successful methods of efficiently and effectively imparting electoral literacy to populations outside the formal sector of educational institutions.
- iv. To effectively use policies and practices that can support inclusive, informed and ethical electoral participation and make it accessible to every citizen.
- v. To develop quality assurance mechanism that would ensure the impact of voter education in supporting informed and ethical participation in electoral democracy reached every adult citizen (Election Commission of India, 2016).

Key Stakeholders in Inclusive Voter Education process

The stakeholders in every successful voter education process shall include but not limited to the following:

- i. National Electoral commission
- ii. Professional adult educators
- iii. Traditional rulers, clubs, associations and community based associations
- iv. Youth groups and other influencers and all citizens Eligible for voting
- v. Prospective contestants and political Parties and their supporters
- vi. Non-Governmental Organizations and International NGOs and Community. Media
- vii. Corporate Sector (Election Commission of India 2016).

Steps for Conducting Inclusive Voter Education

The following are steps towards a successful voter education covers seven steps that educators may use to organize, develop relevant, cost-effective and educationally appropriate activities:

- i. Understanding the voter educational context to be taught
- ii. Establishing the voter educational mandate
- iii. Assessing scope of the voter education programme.
- iv. Developing an appropriate strategy for the training
- v. Designing and implementing the programme
- vi. Monitoring and evaluating the programme and;
- vii. Ensure that best practices and lessons learned are retained for future voter education programmes (Schaffer, 2006).

Addressing Vote Buying Through Inclusive Non-formal Voter Education

This implies to the provision of a specially planned, this is professionally organized and implemented base on the interest of the target population to tactically and patriotically educate voters in Nigeria without discrimination based on hard or simple to reach, distinctions of literacy rates, ethnicity, sex, language, religion, political or other perspectives, social status, economic status or otherwise with the goal of changing vote sellers mindset to reasonably understand the implication of selling their votes by themselves. It refers to the application of inclusive non-formal voter education to bring up vote buying challenges in elections with the objectives of initiating lasting solutions to electoral processes in Nigeria. In the other hand it means to analyze the causes, key players and their reasons for buying votes, the implications of selling vote and make these well known to the entire citizens without any discrimination to provide lasting solution (Quora.com, 2020).

The following means may be used for effective inclusive non-formal voter education in Nigeria to address vote buying:

- 1. Special programme organized by professional adult educators to train voters on why should they vote for a contestant and how to get free, fare, credible, fruitful and itch free election to be conducted physically in every community to include everyone.
- 2. the mass media(mobile cinema, radio and television stations) can be use depending on the geographical location and interest of the target population.
- 3. Printed Materials (posters and pliers) these could be utilize for illustration during training sessions and pace them at public places.
- 4. Face To Face Interaction or community outreach. This should be professionally planned, smartly organized, interestingly prepared and delivered.
- 5. Sending professionally organized attractive and educative text messages in mother tongues to citizens via mobile telephone and the social media.
- 6. Professionally planned advertisement through trending movies

But all these need to be done in collaboration with professional adult educators to ensure professionalism, efficiency and effectiveness of the programme (Center for Civic Education, 1994).

Significance of Voters Education by Professional Adult Educators

Voter education shall be organized by professional adult educators to change the attitude of adult voters to be patriotic enough before, during and after elections so as to assist the election administration in its task of delivering a free, fair, efficient, and cost-effective election. It encompasses the basic voter information that every voter must have in order to arrive prepared at the voting station and vote on the set voting day(s). Voter education sensitizes the electorate on the importance of participating in elections.

Voter education provides the background attitude, behavior, and knowledge amongst citizens that stimulate and consolidate responsible leadership. During an election, this education will ensure effective organization and patriotism by citizens in support of parties and/or causes, behaviors by citizens that is appropriate to a peaceful election, acceptance of the results, and tolerance of competition and oppositions, above all eliminating vote buying and selling (Center for Civic Education, 1994).

Theoretical Framework

In the analysis and interpretation of adult learning processes, Jack Mezirow developed his theory of transformative learning. In collaboration with Paulo Freire they raised an important question,: if learning is about change and if learning is change, why not to consider different levels of personal and social changes? The learning process may remain adaptive by simply adding new knowledge and acquiring new skills, or it may lead to a transformation of the ways in which people look at their reality. In such a case, learning is not only concerned with knowing something, but with knowing something and understanding it differently. This is applicable to voter education because it can make adults to think and reason that, their votes are not ordinary votes but a choice for their future leadership or a choice for their future live. This taught is expected to make voters reason and consequently change their attitudes of vote selling and buying. The theory emphasizes the difference between changes in what we know and changes in how we know about reality, difference between informed conformity and changes in habits of mind, between informational learning and transformational learning.

Transformative learning is learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change an individual's perception about a phenomenon. Such frames of reference are more likely to change beliefs and opinions that will prove more truth to guide action. It holds that beliefs guide action. When the belief that guide actions fail or become problematic, our frames of reference may be transformed and learning can occur as individuals critically reflect on their assumptions and beliefs. Similarly, these philosophical statements are the main issues that voter education in the Nigerian context supposed to be grounded on, because vote selling is an attitudinal action based on individual's belief and this perception of the individual need to be changed by transforming the behavior of the individual concerned (Belanger, 2011).

Al-Shammari *et al.*, (2019), have the opinion that inclusive non-formal education for any type of learner is multifarious, for an education system to become truly inclusive in practice, all the famous conflicting essentials need to be addressed. Practitioners generally advocate for all-encompassing efforts because of the benefits, not only to those benefiting directly but to the entire society on the basis that it should encourage tolerance,

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understanding, and admiration for diversity. Inclusive education, require different approaches compared to formal and other non-formal education settings. Participatory decision making is required, and there is an increased social responsibility for all the stakeholders with both educators and participants considered to have an active and transformational role in the process.

Behaviorism-based Education Practices is a classical theories of learning and also recognized as the one of the oldest. It is known as a leading psychological model, as suggested by the metaphor for learning as the acquisition of stimulus-response pairs (Doolittle, 2014 as cited in Al-Shammari *et al.*, 2019). Behaviorists believe that, the purpose of the theory is to pass on to the learner the knowledge of reality. Behaviorism occurs when consequences are combined with the stimulus or reaction that is followed by reinforcement to be sustained. To summarize, the key principles of behaviorism that support inclusive non-formal education, they include the following statements: behavior is learned, behavior is directed by the setting in which it occurs, facilitation/teaching cannot occur without learning, learning associates with changing behavior, behavior is ruled by what pursue actions, and their needs to be a focus on the observable. Practically, behaviorism-based inclusive education practices include the utilization of behaviorism in inclusive non-formal education settings, which clearly appears in the emphasis on participant's behavior and performance in manipulating stimulus.

Constructivism-based Education practices involve initiating cognitive tools that replicate wisdom of the traditions in which they are applied as well as the insights and experiences of learning. Constructivism has to do with individual's understanding the importance of the social dimension for the period of the learning process through observation, treatment, interpretation, and adaptation of information while building a cognitive structure. Constructivism work on learning that involves reflecting, constructing, creating, and inventing, basically for individuals to develop their own knowledge and meaning. Constructivists believe that an understanding of the brain informs teaching (Lenjani, 2016). Teachers are basically considered facilitators, providing essential information, and organizing activities for participants to discover their own learning. Lenjani (2016) as cited in Al-Shammari *et al.*, (2019) details the main guiding principles of constructivism as:

- 1. Learning is probing for meaning;
- 2. Meaning call for the understanding of the whole as well as the individual parts;
- 3. Teachers should have an understanding of the mental models that learners use to perceive their world and assumptions that they make in order to support their models; and
- 4. The purpose of learning is that an individual constructs his or her own meaning and does not include simply memorizing information for the correct answers or repeating merely what someone else has stated. The key to constructivism is that learning should include learner-centered, task-based, hands-on and minds-on activities (Shi, 2013).

Challenges Inclusive Voter Education May Encounter in Nigeria

Inclusive voter education in Nigeria may come across the following challenges:

- 1. Loss of confidence in government by Nigerians: most of the citizens has the belief that authorities has less concern for welfare and interest of the Nigerians, as such they used to ignore some of the government programmes and policies.
- 2. Rejection or neglect of the programme by the target group: youth, women, illiterate and semi literate adults and those suffering from extreme poverty are the target group for voter education. There is high tendency for them to inclusively honour such invitation except if they will be given some incentives for motivation.
- 3. Low turnout of the target group: if traditional rulers and local politicians were not involve in the programme the turnout will be so poor as such it will not be inclusive as planned.
- 4. Loss of confidence by citizens in the whole electoral processes in Nigeria:
- 5. Government does not have the political will to carry out inclusive voter education for Nigerians: the belief is that, If Nigerian poor man will have such education, majority of the politicians will withdraw from politics because lies would not work again.
- 6. Ineffective means of inclusive voter education used in Nigeria, European Union (2021).

Conclusion

The Nigerian electoral authority and NGOs used to conduct voter education in the country whenever elections are approaching through radio and television. Whereas voter education in a country like Nigeria is beyond that, as such , voter education should be professionally organized in collaboration with adult education experts to change the perception of citizens particularly on vote selling and realization of the meaning of their votes. Similarly government should try to mind interests and welfare of it's citizens so that it could gain it's lost glory from Nigerians. Inclusive and effective voter education is the only means for Nigeria to use to restore it's lost confidence and eliminate the menace of vote buying and selling among Nigerian electorates. Nigeria is a country suffering from low voter turnout as a result of inadequate and ineffective means of voter education and loss of confidence in the entire electoral processes by citizens. This is well known to the international community as such could downgrade the image of the nation to the international community.

Suggestions

To overcome the problem of vote buying in the Nigerian electoral process, being informed by the preceding discourse, the following recommendations were put forward by the authors:

- 1. Nigerian government should change the current mode of administration to take care of the needs and interests of citizens so that Nigerians would regain confidence in the government and welcome it's policies and programmes.
- 2. The INEC shall collaborate with adult and non-formal education professionals to plan, organize and implement all the voter education programmes and it should be a regular activity not during election alone.

- 3. Election authorities should make adequate budget to provide transport fare and meals for participants of voter education programmes as means for motivating them to accept attend and stay throughout the voter education programme.
- 4. Traditional rulers, religious leaders and local politicians should be fully involved in the voter education programme to ensure inclusive turnout will be so poor as such it will not be inclusive as planned.
- 5. Election authority and government should be practically, administratively and behaviorally responsible in the discharge of their duties so that citizens could get in confidence them.
- 6. Government and INEC should develop the political will to carry out inclusive voter education for Nigerians to ensure effective and efficient implementation..
- 7. The election authorities should carry out all the voter education programmes face to face with less programmes on television and radio to make the education more effective and efficient.

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