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The Relationship Between Levels of Education and Perceptions of Democratic Governance Among Nigerian School Leavers

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the views and perception of school leavers about the democratic government in Nigeria. A self-designed questionnaire was used for collection of their views. The participants of the study comprised 500 school leavers selected across different working places in the six states of Southwest Nigeria. Results clearly revealed that majority of the respondents are not satisfied with the current performance of the present democratic Government in Nigeria.

Most of the respondents suggested participation of everyone in the act of governance that favor rule of law, equality, and freedom and that this should be adopted by the government. The researcher therefore recommended a democratic system of government that will incorporate all the basic principles of democracy into the system of government, while marginalization and neglect of the poor, women, youth, and rural dwellers should be avoided.

Keywords: Perception, perception of school leavers Nigeria, performance, women, youth, and rural dwellers.

INTRODUCTION

The desire for a genuine free democratic society in Nigeria was an illusion until May 29, 1999 when a democratically elected government was sworn in after a long and protracted military rule. This desire was clearly shown in the unending demand before May 29, 1999 for the restoration of a democratic society /polity by Nigerians in the various aborted transition programs. This desire also manifested on assumption of office of this present administration, when majority of Nigerians who were tired of the decay of the Nigerian society rolled out drums to celebrate the coming of "government of hope".

People who live in abject poverty in the midst of plenty of natural resources, who were victims of epileptic power supply and inadequate telecommunication facilities, and devastating economy believed they would fare better under a democratically elected government. Most Nigerians justifiably felt that, even if there would be no drastic improvements, their quality of life would at least not deteriorate under this regime and that all would be incorporated into governance

Four years however, since the present dispensation was hosted in Nigeria the atmosphere particularly among the educated elites has been one of general dissatisfaction. The economy appears to be drifting and the value of the local currency has taken a dive. The government has come under sever public scrutiny such that in many instances, it leadership across the three levels of government has not been spared public umbrage for what many view as it's below –expectation performance in the business of governance.

Indeed the government has been lampooned and upbraided for its anti-people's programs like privatization, uncritical adoption of IMF/World Bank conditionality, reluctance of the government to implement agreement entered into with some trade union Particularly Academic Staff Union of Universities, irregularities of salaries, pensions and gratuities to retirees, the Executives and National Assemblies inclination for expending almost all their energy in discussing their members' welfare to the detriment of giving attention to its constitutional duties, the wasteful international tour of the president, undemocratic political asylum to Charles Taylor- the former dictator of Liberia and above all the repeated fuel hike by the government without consultation with Stakeholders in government.

This general dissatisfaction about the nascent democracy in Nigeria is now giving most Nigerians concerns about the future and sustainability of the democratic system.

The basic rationale of democracy is that elected representatives of the people and public functionaries are entrusted with power, which is a trust reposed on them by the people. That trust has to be discharged for the benefit of the nation and the people. Public functions and statutory powers are to be formed to serve the public purpose and national interest, not for personal aggrandizement, nor for extraneous or ulterior considerations. That is why democracy is generally perceived as the best system of government, which serves as the framework for societal development in this modern era.

Various scholars like; Akinyanju(2000), Ola Oni(1999), Toyo (1994), Babarinde (1994,1995, 1997) Damalie (2000), Schumiter and Karl (1994) Jega(1997) Oni (2001) have define this concept in different ways summarizing that; democracy is a comprehensive concept with no key containing definite right or wrong answer. Some scientists find that the common definition of democracy is so vague that by and large all political system could be labeled democratic.

The word "democracy" originates from the ancient Greece, meaning "govern by people". The interest of the majority of the people is paramount. And since democracy is about people that is why it is define as 'government of people, by the people and for the people'. According to Ayoade(1998) ,it embraces the mechanisms, the process and the institutions through which individuals and groups express their interest ,exert their rights and carry out their obligations.

There are many models of democracy however, which Jega(1997) explain have been experimented with the world, but the western liberal democracy model, has through propaganda and skillful indoctrination, become the dominant model presently. Jega(1997) stressed further that the key principles underlying liberal democracy have a wide populist appeal, which makes it attractive to many in the modern era. For examples principles, such as popular sovereignty and participation, representation, guarantee of basic freedoms, equality, have great wide attraction, even if in reality, their actualization leaves much to be desired.

So the broad explanation of the on going was summarized in Babarinde (1994) that democracy exist when people free and on equal terms are capable to decide on all matters regarding their lives. How people perceived and practice democracy is dependant on how they live, their live, their culture, living conditions and existing values. So, it is about representation and participation, but with the objective of equitable distribution of resources, fair play and justice, the institutionalization of the rule of law and empowerment. It is additionally about equitable social provisioning, judicious sharing of the national revenue and effective mobilization and utilization of societal resources. It is also about accountability. That is why in this conception, Oni (2001) stress that; popular empowerment is central to the issue of participation, involving not just casting votes in the choice of representatives and leaders but also input in the critical decisions, which affect their daily life and survival.

The foregoing explain that governance in a democratic society means administration of affairs characterized by participation, the responsibility, the transparency, the respect for law, the search for efficiency, for efficacy and for justice for all through thoroughness, focus discipline, experience, wisdom and above all mental alertness. Unfortunately, the democratic government in Nigeria today is being perceived with mixed grill and divergent views by most of the people.

It is regrettable that there is nothing in the policies of the government to show that the generality of Nigerians are satisfied with the tepid performance that is on display. Security of life and poverty is now the order of the day. Workers are not being paid regularly; Pensioners are not being paid their stipends, some for more than two years. The backlog on pensions according to Comet October 1, 2003 has billowed to about two trillion naira, and for two years now the, the country has been run without a proper budget.

The people are asking with mixed feeling about the dividend of democracy promised them at the inception of this government in 1999. Has the government addressed the issues of poverty, unemployment and healthcare delivery? How is the economy faring? How about agriculture and rising cost of living? Is government rehabilitating social and public infrastructure? Is the manufacturing sectors being strengthened to promote commerce and job creation? How about the university system, is government trying to stem the chaos and degradation in the ivory tower caused by poor funding?

How about security in the land and rule of law? How far has government progressed in these vital areas of it's responsibly? It is true that any administration may only be able to do so little within four years but it is long enough a period for any government to demonstrate commitment and make live better for it citizenry?

It is with this background that this study was conceived to elicit views and opinions of Nigerian school leavers about their perception via assessment of the present democratic government and whether all Nigerians irrespective of education, gender, age and location were adequately incorporated into governance. While the study also want to contribute to the much needed mass political participation and education of Nigerian citizens.

The study's major concern therefore, was to determine the relationship (if any) in the levels of education and perception of democratic governance, that is, how does Nigerian school leaver perceive democracy?

Is there any correlation between levels of education and perception of democracy? How does the urban and rural school leaver perceive democratic governance in Nigeria?

The choice of school leavers of different levels of education was purposively scheduled to represent the views of the larger society.

Hypotheses

The study was designed with the following hypotheses in view:

- H01: There will be no significant relationship in the perception of democratic governance between male and female school leavers.
- H02: There will be no significant relationship in the perception of democratic governance between school leavers in urban and rural areas.
- H03: There will be no significant relationship in the perception of democratic governance between primary and secondary school leavers.
- H04: There will be no significant relationship in the perception of democratic governance between N.C.E/O.N.D. holders and TCII/Technical College certificate holders.
- H05: There will be no significant relationship in the perception of democratic governance between H.N.D/First Degree and Postgraduate certificates holders.

METHODOLOGY

Design

The research design used in this study is an ex post facto survey. This was adopted to explain the relationship among the variables in the study.

Target Population, Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample involved 500 school leavers of different level of education from both rural and urban location. 54 were holders of primary school leaving certificate, 103 were drawn from holders of secondary school certificate, 93 others were holders of TCII certificate/ Technical college certificate, and 75 were holders of Ordinary National Diploma? National Higher Diploma and university first degree, while 75 were holders of different category of post graduate certificates. Out of these, 396 were males and 104 were females.

The ages of the subjects ranges between 14 and 55 years and all the subjects were drawn from different working places like; Teaching Service, both primary and secondary schools, workers in tertiary institutions ; both academic and non –academic, hospitals, banks, media houses and other public and private establishment both in rural and urban locations within the South West of Nigeria.

Instrumentation

The research instrument employed for the study was a self developed questionnaire and was validated through experts' opinion of four reviewers in the field of Sociology, Political Science, Measurement and Evaluation and Teacher Education within University of Ibadan. Their observations and suggestions were used in revising the draft questionnaire before its final adoption.

The questionnaire was trial tested within university of Ibadan and a reliability coefficient of correction for internal consistency of 0.87 and stability of 0.91 was used for data collection.

This is rated very high in educational methodology (Best, 1981). The questionnaire has a total of 25 items divided into two sections; Section A was intended to elicit information from respondents on their personal bio –data, while Section B raised relevant questions about how the respondents perceived democratic government in Nigeria. The four-point scale of "strongly agree", "Agree", "Disagree", and "Strongly Disagree" were used to determine the respondents' views.

Procedure

The questionnaire was personally administered to various workers who were school leavers within South West Nigeria, and the mode of administration was the same in the entire working places visited. The investigator discussed with the head of each working place about the purpose of the study and each respondent was adequately briefed on the relevance of the study.

At the appointed date and time, the investigator visited each working places to retrieve the completed questionnaire. The investigator personally scored the responses and the data collected were later analyzed. While 'strongly agree' attracts four marks 'agree' attracts three marks, 'disagree' attracts two marks and 'strongly disagree' attracts one marks.

Data Analysis

Chi-square statistics was used to analyze the data collected and to determine the extent of relationship among the variables.

RESULTS

Table: 1
Results of the relationship between the male and female perceptions of democratic governance.

Variables	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL	X2cal	X2 obs	df
Male	168 (79.2)	151 (81.18)	30 (75)	45 (72.58)	396	9.56	7.815	3
Female	44 (20.8)	33 (18.81)	10 (25)	17 (27.42)	104			
Total	212	186	40	62	500			

$P < 0.05$

The above result shows that there is a significant relationship in male and female perception of democratic governance since X^2_{cal} is greater than X^2_{obs} at 0.05 significant levels; therefore reject H_{01} that states that there is no significant relationship in the perception of democratic governance between male and female school leavers.

Table: 2
Results of the relationship in the perceptions of democratic governance by school leavers in urban and rural areas.

Variables	SA	A	D	SA	TOTAL	Cal	Obs	df
Urban	150 (70.75)	125 (71.43)	50 (64.10)	25 (83.33)	350	5.25	7.815	3
Rural	62 (29.25)	50 (28.57)	28 (35.90)	10 (28.57)	150			
Total	212	175	78	35	500			

$P < 0.05$

The above table shows that there is a significant relationship between perception of democratic governance and school leavers in rural and urban areas. The X^2_{cal} is lesser than X^2_{obs} . Therefore, reject H_{02} .

Table: 3
Results of the relationship in the perceptions of democratic governance by primary and secondary school leavers.

Variables	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL	Cal	Obs	df
Primary	19 (29.69)	15 (25.42)	11 (57.89)	9 (60)	54	7.02	7.815	3
Secondary	45 (70.31)	44 (74.58)	8 (42.11)	6 (40)	103			
Total	64	59	19	15	157			

$P < 0.05$

The above table shows that the perception of democratic governance between the primary and secondary school leavers is significant, therefore reject the H_{03}

Table: 4
Results of the relationship in the perceptions of democratic governance by N.C.E/O.N.D holders and TCII /Technical college certificate holders.

Variables	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL	Cal	Obs	df
NCE/OND	23 (34.85)	20 (35.09)	3 (33.33)	4 (36.36)	50	4.63	7.815	3
TCII/ Technical	43 (65.15)	37 (64.49)	6 (66.66)	7 (63.64)	93			
Total	66	57	9	11	143			

P<0.05

The above table shows that the result is significant because χ^2 calculated is lesser than χ^2 critical at 0.05 significant levels.

Therefore reject H04 that stated that there is no significant relationship in the perception of democratic governance between NCE/OND holders and TCII / Technical college certificate holders.

Table: 5
Results of the relationship in the perceptions of democratic governance by H.N.D/First degree holders and post graduate certificate holders.

Variables	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL	Cal	Obs	df
HND/First degree	9 (23.08)	8 (24.24)	5 (25)	3 (37.50)	25	3.47	7.815	3
Post graduate degree	30 (76.92)	25 (75.76)	15 (75)	5 (62.50)	75			
Total	39	33	20	8	100			

P<0.05

Since χ^2 calculated is lesser than χ^2 observed at 0.05 significant levels, therefore do not reject the H05 that stated that there is no significant relationship in the perception of democratic governance between HND/First degree holders and post graduate certificate holders.

DISCUSSION

How people perceive and practice democracy is dependant on how they live, their culture, living conditions and existing values. The result of this study have shown that there is no significant relationship in the perception of democratic government by different groups considered for the study, therefore all the formulated hypotheses except H05 were rejected on the basis of the result. In other words, it should be noted that a large number of the sampled population appreciate democracy as the best system of government but frown at the manner in which democratic government is being operated in Nigeria. This is to say that there is an appreciated divergent view in the responses of the sampled population about democratic system in Nigeria. The population favors democracy as the best system of government (95%). And the overall result gives account of the road so far since 1999.

The result also shows gender gap in democratic governance in Nigeria. Women participation in Governance still lags behind despite the agreed goal of the Beijing Platform of Action to achieve at least 30% positions for women in national decision making as a milestone towards the ultimate goal of 50%. Most of the female respondents

accused Nigeria democratic government for marginalizing women in the act of governance despite their economic and social roles. This agree with Oni (2001), Ahmad (1999), Badejo(2001), Akande(1999) that; a look at democratic data available on voting habits of women revealed that there are more women voters than men, despite this, the present democratic government reveals infinitesimal representation of women in elective post.

Findings also revealed that the youth, being the majority in the society have remained marginalized as well in the political terrain of Nigeria. The fact that democratic principles and ideas offer equal opportunity for all to participate in the democratic processes involved in enthroning a democratic rule. Young people as an integral and important part of the civil society have an inalienable role to play in governance of the society and for this role to be played proactively they need to be empowered politically. This also agree with the view of Akinyanju (2000), Olorode (1997) that make case for youth empowerment.

The investigation also show that elections conducted in Nigeria up to date have been bedeviled with fraud and have not received total acceptability of the population. This creates difficulty for the democratization process, as the trusts of mandates of governments deriving from these elections are not firm.

The result of the study also revealed that rural dwellers were not adequately cared for by the government, they remained marginalized and their involvement in politics has been minimal even when they have representatives at parliamentary level, According to Olowu (1995), the rural dwellers haven't been involved in contentious issue that affect everybody in the society, while economic planners have failed to recognize the rural dwellers and they still suffer from high rates of illiteracy, higher rate of unemployment and lack of essential social services.

Urban dwellers also decried that democratic governance has not been able to solve challenging problems of urban centers like; urban pollution, traffic congestion, poverty, malnutrition, nuclear and industrial toxic waste, security, unemployment, upsurge in prevalence of incurable diseases, sophisticated crime waves, religious violence, and ethnic intolerance.

Considering different categories of the study, it was gathered that democracy in Nigeria suffers from the problems of corruption, high level of illiteracy, poverty and non-existence of ideologically based political parties.

We also discovered that democracy cannot be achieved in a society in which the majority are poor and have to depend on the few wealthy ones for their livelihood. In such a society the corruption influence of money as gathered is pervasive and democracy is purchased by moneybags and what result is plutocracy. This explains that acute state of poverty in Nigeria militates against mass participation in the democratic process. Majority of citizens are thus disenfranchised or refused to show interest and renders the mass unable to defend democracy. Ogunna(1981), Mezieobi (1995) show evidence of this when they explain that democratic system bedeviled with poverty are not likely to promote or bring out the best form of democracy.

The study also shows that there others who perceive democracy as a process to bring about salvation from the dominion by a hegemonic ethno- religious group, which is perceived to have cornered power and access to the country's resources for their own benefit to the detriment of other ethno-religious groups in the country. From this perspective, these respondents opine that democracy should be about restructuring the federation; liberating and freeing minorities and the oppressed and giving them unfettered rights of self-determination and resource control. This view is supported by Oni (2001) and Jega(1997)that make case for the country's restructuring through a sovereign national conference.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

For any government to earn credibility worldwide and achieve a transparent and accountable government, it should provide a balance, which accurately and equally reflects the composition of gender, youth and both rural and urban dwellers in their government. Consideration should be given to women and youth when decisions are being taken at all tiers of government.

Thus, for democracy to thrive in any nation every citizen irrespective of tribe, status, gender, environment, age and religion must be given equal opportunity to develop his talent and participate actively in democratic processes. Thereby, the object of equal opportunity will be seeing as the production of individuals who, seizing the opportunity will develop themselves to the highest level compatible with their genetic, sex, age and environmental data.

It would seem that a general dissatisfaction with the conduct of political class has reinforced a perception of the need to broaden the basis of democratic participation, such that the real and genuine desires and aspirations of the people would be taken into account. Thus, increasingly, a conception of democracy emerged which is based on notions of popular participation, empowerment, accountability and good governance, social democracy and social provision, and permanent removal of military from Nigeria political system. However, it needs to be stated that the popular conception and perception of democracy can only have positive meaning if Nigerian political class takes democracy a bit more seriously, and the electorate becomes educated and enlightened. A combination of reckless political class, illiteracy and poverty, which presently pervade Nigeria society, can only further depoliticize the masses, and push democratic empowerment and participation out of their reach. In this kind of context, democracy, no matter how beautifully conceived would have no intrinsic value for the majority of the poor masses.

Findings revealed that education is a vital social institution that provides man's positive outlook towards ideas and issues and contribute to the advancement of social welfare for evolving a harmonious life. However, various reports confirmed that Nigeria population is still dominated by high rate illiterates. Towards this end, government should understand also that without education an individual in modern society is unlikely to proceed very far in developing the particular aspect of a worthwhile form of life to which he is suited. This explains that every person in this country must be treated always as an end. Thus, government must therefore accept the responsibility of providing educational opportunity to all people who can profit from it.

Democracy as we could see from the foregoing can best serve our national interest in this 21st century, if it could facilitate the emergence of leadership cadre, which is responsible, and responsive to the needs and aspirations of Nigerians regardless of socio-cultural differences. Such leadership could lead by example and contain the threats posed to national integration by persons pushing extremist perspectives and agendas; it could recognize the obligation of the state to accord priority to education, so that we could have an educated and enlightened society with the capacity of self-generating and self-sustaining development. Only such a leadership could establish and sustain the democratic system. So building democratic government that will satisfy the needs of the people and which every people would be involved in governance requires reforms in all institutions including family and schools that will further shape values and behaviors and develop intrinsic ability in people to engage in democratic governance. It is with all these that democracy can be perceived unanimously as a form of government in which every citizen in a state has a political investments of political participation and trust in which the power to rule rested mostly on the consent of majority of the people in the state regardless of their status, while the rulers is in turn accountable to the people in general. So the excesses of the ruler will be checked by the people.

Further research could be carried out in areas not covered in this study such as: gender gap in democratic governance; an evaluation of the democratic government in Nigeria.

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Dr. Soji Oni had a BA.Ed in English Studies Education from Obafemi Awolowo University Ile- Ife Nigeria. After the mandatory national youth service corps, he proceeded to the University of Ibadan for his Masters degree in Sociology of Education, and started his doctoral degree in Sociology of Education in the same university immediately after his M.Ed programme. During his doctoral programme he got one of the most prestigious academic fellowship to United State of America (Fulbright Fellowship). He has contributed substantially into different academic journals both locally and internationally. His area of focus include; Social problems, social change, social deviance with particular focus on Students Secret cult in Nigeria and Democracy and education.

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