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## **NEEDED URGENTLY: A PEDAGOGY FOR BOOSTING THE INTERESTS OF YOUTHS IN CITIZENSHIP AND CIVIC EDUCATION IN NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Policies and policy directions in Nigeria are terribly shallow in terms of welfare considerations for the youths and the sustainable development of the Nigerian state. Adults who have been at the helm of affairs have been superlatively self-centered and this has consequently retarded general development in the Nigerian state in general and detrimentally hampered the development of the youths in particular. This paper makes a case for citizenship and civic education for the youths as a viable option for reversing this unfortunate trend. The paper extols the values of citizenship and civic education as needed innovations to affect the necessary changes and makes a case for urgent pedagogical re-engineering where the interests of the youths can be boosted in citizenship and civic education as a strategy to reverse the ugly trend. The paper proposes and recommends that such pedagogical strategies can focus on sensitizing the youths on the dangers that are inherent in their continued marginalization, making youths to think critically and analytically especially on how their participation in civic and democratic processes can reverse the trends in their favour, making social justice and good governance the focus of educational provision for youths and translating theory into practice by inculcating democratic norms of participation, commitment to learning, agreeing with others and accommodating divergent views of others.*

**KEYWORDS:** Youths, Pedagogy, Citizenship education, Civic education, Democracy, Politics, Policy, Nigeria.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Globally every society looks up to its youths for the sustenance of ideas, philosophies, ideologies and policies upon which the society can sustainably move forward and consequently develop. Because youths are valued and esteemed in this way, “most societies regard them as special breed or sacred species that require special care and consequently need to be nurtured and invested in” (Uyanga and Nwaokugha. 2014:103). As high sounding and optimistic as this can be, youths do not show adequate interests in the affairs of the society and humanity in the course of their development that can realistically assure the society and humankind that the youths whom they are bequeathing the future onto has skills, abilities and capacities for living up to what is naturally expected of them. Many factors seem to account for the not too good behaviours of the youths in the affairs of the society and humanity generally.

A novice in the act of analysis and critical thinking can observe that youths presently lack requisite knowledge that can aid and assist them realize the visions of their societies. The root cause of all

the predicaments of the youths can be situated in their terrible lack of interests in citizenship and civic education and their associated civic engagement, critical and analytic consciousness which are fundamental for shaping and reshaping society and humanity into forms upon which they can be challenged to challenge themselves to redress whatever predicaments that may threaten their individual and collective existence.

This terrible deficit associated with present day youths can be located in the general abysmal attitudes of the society towards the youths. Across the globe, there are minimal policy initiatives for the welfare of the youths and where such policies exist, there are lack of correspondence between them and efforts to translate the policies into reality for the emancipation of the youths. Naturally, matching policy with real actions can be a route upon which youths can attain enviable position and consequently become ready for any challenge-imaginary or real in the future. In fact youth development and emancipation are often eulogized by states but there is hardly any concrete thing that is done in that direction. Equipping youths with the right and requisite education that can enhance their developments and contributions to the growth of their state has never become a priority. This is where those who propose that such proposals have never left the drawing board can be correct. Most states provide education that is far from providing the youth with the right knowledge and skills for their empowerment and growth. The claim of most states is that general education is synonymous with youth development and critical empowerment and this behaviour has become so obvious that in their not-too-good educational provisions, most states deliberately ignore those aspects of education that are critical and fundamental for the civic engagement and empowerment of the youths

It is self evident that education as provided to present day youths by most states that recognize education as a human right for their citizens still lack those aspect of education for civic engagement and critical empowerment of the citizens for tasks ahead such as social reconstruction and social engineering and aspects of politics and democratic participation are terribly shallow, non-existent or presented in ways that in addition to frustrating the learners, stiffens their creative and critical consciousness by instilling fear and other crippling thoughts in them. The most troublesome and worrisome disability and challenge that youths suffer and face occur at the political and democratic fronts and this has become so monumental that it assumes the status of a classical paradox. Most political regimes and democracies globally do not prioritize the welfare of the youths in their political and democratic equation despite the fact that youth according to Wallimann-Helmer (2014:17) “constitute a relevant social group with specific interests” It is a thing of common knowledge that issues of intergenerational justice and equality do not occupy space in political and democratic deliberations as engineered by present crop of leaders who are mainly adults and this deliberate omissions leaves the youths with bleak future. Priority areas in current political and democratic deliberations prioritize and focus on areas of interests of the adult where indulgence in criminal acts of embezzlements, excessive borrowing without corresponding production of wealth and lack of political will to initiate actions that can guarantee the youths an enduring and prosperous future that they can look up with hope and optimism are terrible norms. In fact what the present political and democratic regimes globally pile up and guarantee the youth is a miserable future where additional and prolonged suffering, choking and biting poverty continuously witch-hunt and trap down the youths into everlasting suffering in the forms of perpetual repayment of debts created for them by their leaders in the past. Outside neglecting the

interests of the youths, political and democratic practices and innovations are busy recycling the same calibre of old breeds whose involvement and participation in politics completely lack visions that promote social justice but vibrant and robust in milking the state dry for the social and economic emancipation of their sons and daughters.

This is the case in Nigeria and an issue which this paper wants to address. This paper is basically and functionally aimed at discussing and fashioning out strategies upon which the interests of youths in citizenship and civic education can be boosted in Nigeria. The paper is deep rooted in the philosophical method which incorporates speculation, analysis and prescription and a tradition that is associated with the philosophical method in any discourse is to start with a clarification of key terms or concepts under investigation. To this end we start by looking at youth, citizenship and civic education.

### **The Concept of Youth**

The saying that words and concepts that are frequently used are among the commonest that lack universally accepted meaning applies in the case of the concept of youth. What this obviously translates into is that what is called youth yields itself to a multiplicity of definitions and meanings so much that individuals, institutions and states provide different interpretations and meanings of the concept of youth.

Majority of the definitions as provided by individuals, institutions and states range from one age bracket to another or quality of being young. A critical look at these two points from where youth is being defined cannot in any way adequately say much about youths. For instance, George and Uyanga (2014:40) quoting the National Youth Development plan of 2001 defines youth as “young persons of ages 18-35 years who are citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria”. Uyanga and Nwaokugha (2014) did an extensive review of the concept of youth where they captured the positions of other scholars and institutions on the subject matter of youth. According to them the Commonwealth Youth Programme places youth within the age bracket of 18-34 years. Also citing the report of the CARICOM Commission on Youths Development (January 2010) Uyanga and Nwaokugha (2014:106) write that the report defines youth “as a sociological term referring to that stage of life cycle between middle adolescence (14-15) and adulthood- in other words when one is no longer a child but not an adult”. This particular report, they maintain, acknowledges United Nations and the Commonwealth as defining youth as that segment of the Population aged 15 to 24 and 15 to 29 years respectively.

Gyima-Brempong and Kimenyi (2013:3) quoting the African Youth Report (2009) (hereafter, the AYR) and UNECA (2009) write that “youths are defined as people between 15 and 39 years”. It is needful one point out that in the definitions of youth as provided by the African Youth Report (2009), many African countries have different age brackets for their youths. For instance, in Ghana, Tanzania and South Africa youths are people between 15 and 35 Years. For Nigeria and Swaziland, youths are people between the ages of 12 and 30 years while in Botswana and Mauritius youths are those between the ages of 14 and 25 years.

A casual observer can discover that there is a sharp variation in the age brackets for youths as provided by the African Youth Report (2009) and UNECA (2009) and what the various African

States claim to be the age brackets for youths in their various states. In other words, what some countries claim to be the age bracket for their youths is different from what the other countries claim. Outside inter-country comparison, age bracket for youths in one country, say Nigeria is a cause for concern. One can recall that the National Youth Service Corps programme in Nigeria makes 30 years of age the limit for youths to qualify to take part in the scheme but in the same country people of 45 years of age also claim to be youths, (Uyanga and Nwaokugha, 2014).

One emerging truth that is as obvious as day and night about the concept of youth is that in addition to being enigmatic, the concept of youth lacks a universally agreed upon age bracket especially in Africa. This position comes to the fore when one observes that in some states, the age bracket for youth clashes and encroaches with the age bracket for such other terms as teenager and adolescent, and consequently makes it extremely difficult for one who is using age in identifying and classifying who exactly a youth is to embark on a futile adventure. From the brief outline above, it is obvious that the use of both age and quality of being young in defining and determining who is a youth can be faulty and misleading because reports and categorization of youths in and outside countries are contradicting a subject matter that is quite visible. It can be possible that an alternative for defining and identifying youths can be the characteristics which youths manifest.

Youths manifest characteristics, which are unique to them upon which they can be identified and consequently conscientized upon for playing specific roles in the society especially those roles for addressing and redressing their predicaments and responding to challenges in their states. Youths characteristically are opposed to the sustenance of status quo in their various societies. This characteristic is manifested in their desire to consistently ask questions on general issues in their environment with the intention to generate heat capable of enabling them to influence that environment. This makes the youths to be associated with change and is the basis upon which most people see youths as deviants and people who are not really to be guided by norms of the society. Because youths are associated with change, people also see them as that segment of the population that is in transition. In their desire to transit, youths live in a world of fantasy and assume that everything is possible. In this euphoria, no youth dreams to be an under-achiever, no matter the realities on ground. Because youths have this frame of mind, they easily blame their parents or those ahead of them on any perceived shortcomings that presently pose a threat on their way. Youths in their characteristic nature are adventurers and risk takers especially in the dismantling of structure that are perceived to be anti-youth and anti-progressive. Youths easily learn of such structures from persons who claim to be progressives. Ironically these persons use the youths to dismantle such structures, only to revert to status quo. However, a development that works for youths and the society is that youths unconsciously, gain some levels of awareness that propels their agitation for human rights, economic, environmental and social justice.

On the other hand, youths are a combat ready constituency. This singular characteristic singles youths out as flashpoints in issues of civil uprising, riots, demonstrations and revolutions. What this seems to suggest about youths is that in most cases, their behaviours correspond to what Proverbs 14:29 calls “hasty of spirit” that “exalted folly”. This may not be an indication of lack of understanding but a behavioural characteristic that is unique with their age and level of thinking. The claim of youths in embracing the above unconventional means is that as engendered species

whose welfare is always neglected, they can attract public attention to their predicaments if they threaten their state with violence.

Youths are creative, vibrant and have consumption patterns that can boost any economy. This is in addition to being a cheap labour force as well as a force for turning the political and democratic fortunes of a state especially when provided the right environment and given the right education. The bible may have captured this basic characteristic of the youth or ideas people have about the youth and their mindset when it prophetically writes in Ecclesiastes 11:9 that

*Rejoice, O young man in thy youth and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth and walk in the ways of thine heart and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into judgement*

A simple translation of the above quotation can point in the direction that youths are a significant force in molding and shaping policies of the state and upholding or refusing to uphold this clarion call can by choice existentially lead to enjoyment when things are rightly done or face everlasting and perpetual suffering when things are not rightly done during the period of one's youth.

### **Citizenship Education**

Citizenship education according to Homana, Barber and Torney- Purta (2006:3) is:

*The opportunities provided by schools to engage students in meaningful learning experiences such as role plays, debates, mock trials, classroom deliberations, student councils, service -learning and other active teaching strategies to facilitate their development as politically and socially responsible individuals.*

The above suggests that citizenship education can be framed in a plethora of contexts that stimulate a plethora of ideas. In all, a unifying thread that binds the plethora of ideas inherent in the meanings of citizenship education is that it is an educational provision that encourages "democratic political participation" (Annette, 2009:1) of their state. Why the participation of a people in their democratic evolution is necessary and a matter that everyone should show sufficient interest is that participation in the democratic process of a state avails all citizens the opportunity to positively influence state policies in directions that are most favourable to citizens and their state. A basic belief that strongly makes case for the participation of citizens in their democratic and political development is that politics is basic and fundamental in determining the form and shape in which policies that govern a people or state are made and since no one takes interests in working against himself or herself, participation in democracy and politics affords citizens the necessary platform and opportunity to collectively make or evolve policies that can work for the common good of all or that can be in the interests of all. Outside promoting democracy and civic engagement, citizenship education according to Annette (2009:2) promotes "communitarian concern for moral and political socialization", where maximum focus is on providing citizens with basic literacy that can enable them respond and address contemporary challenges in a contemporary and challenging world. Citizenship education is also deep rooted in equipping citizens with the capacity to think analytically, reflectively and critically with the aim of enabling citizens to respond to a world



where pluralism and the ability to accommodate the wishes and interests of others are acceptable and cherished norms.

Believing the right attitude for maximizing the potentials of youths is given or made a priority through citizenship education, the target or focus of such educational provision can be to equip youths with skills and a sense of value judgment and moral rationality that can enable them analyze, criticize, synthesize and justify issues and positions in their quest and desire to actively participate and be engaged in the day to day affairs of their community or state

### **Civic Education**

The concept of civic education is fundamentally broad and to be expected of any concept in this category is a plethora of philosophical reflections and definitions so much that one scholar can provide more than one definition or interpretation of the concept. Levinson (2014:1) defines civic education as education for civic empowerment. Recognizing how the concept easily admits new definitions and meaning Levinson (2014:1) writes that “civic education can be used more capaciously to indicate the knowledge, skills and attitudes that children are expected to learn to be virtuous and civically productive members of society”.

What civic education makes a priority is the promotion of such practices as democracy, human rights, patriotism and national identity. Because of the seriousness of these concepts in the building and development of states, the study of civic education has become a flashpoint for state that want to redefine themselves in comity of states. Through civic education states can reproduce and modify themselves in any form and shape they want. States that uphold the virtues and ideals of democracy can deeply entrench such through the study of civic education while those that subscribe to autocratic and authoritarian ideals can also use civic education to achieve such motives. The baseline here is that any form of government that operates in any state needs civic education to perpetuate itself. A value that civic education equips youths with that is peculiar to democracy is the thirst and zeal for self rule, participation in one's governance, compromise in democratic and political issues, tolerance for the opinion and positions of others, respect for oneself and others, respect for human rights, freedom of speech and all other freedoms recognized by globally recognized conventions and the ability to reach decisions through the consent of the majority.

Where it is appropriately handled, civic education can sensitize youths to know and value their rights, become aware and conscious of injustice, oppression, abuse of human right, marginalization and above all how to demand from their leaders the dividends of democracy as well as the exercise of lawful authority so as to reduce human suffering and misery. Requisite skills that youths can acquire through civic education include the use of human and material resources to achieve maximum political and democratic results that can bring about social, economic and environmental justice in the state. Youths are also expected to acquire adequate knowledge of other broad concepts that promote harmonious living like justice, morality and human rights.

This is usually in the form of developing the individual's critical consciousness so much that every challenging situation presents itself as an opportunity to be explored for the advancement of humanity. For instance, the skills in youths who are endowed with manipulative linguistic skills

to persuade an audience and those with greater organizational and managerial skills can be drilled and exposed on how such skills can become great assets or raw materials that can trigger excellence in the democratic and political process. The key here is that civic education explores citizen's responsiveness in the form of developing potentials individuals are endowed with by transforming them into assets that can enrich the political and democratic process for the common good of humanity.

It is obvious that citizenship and civic education travel on the same road and target the destination as both can be used to condition youths to demonstrate absolute loyalty and obedience to one's fatherland. It has to be noted that citizenship and civic education has basic and fundamental potentials for addressing complex problems that threaten Nigeria's unity and corporate existence and by focusing on such issue through citizenship and civic education, Nigeria can be repositioned for greater achievements in comity of states. Much of these can be achieved when focus for reimagining, reinventing and exploring the potentials of citizenship and civic education is directed through the Nigerian youths. When appropriately explored, citizenship and civic education promises to create sufficient and needed awareness in the youths that can establish, resonate and create in their memory new behavioural patterns that can remind them that the sustenance of peace and justice or the promotion of all the necessary political, moral, economic, scientific and technological conditions for sustainable development that can lead Nigeria and the global community to realize individual and collective dreams lie in our hands.

When the philosophy upon which citizenship and civic education rests is adequately entrenched in the psyche of the youths, such developments can have in-built potentials to checkmate any form of possible risky behaviour that may be detrimental to the moral health of the youths and that of his state. More importantly the civic, emancipator, revolutionary, liberating and transforming virtue citizenship and civic education promote in youths can guide their thinking such that their actions and activities can be the cornerstone for improving their creativity and productivity in addition to promoting their participation in cultural, social and economic lives of members of their state.

Not to be forgotten or ignored is the fact that meaningful participation and engagement of the youths through citizenship and civic education provides networks of opportunities for youths to brainstorm on those critical issues that attempt to threaten, destabilize and stagnate the state and consequently raise platform upon which youths can work together with adults to find solutions to such problems. That this opportunity is provided through citizenship and civic education can open up opportunities and new direction for the tapping of fresh ideas that are inherently in the youths for the advancement of the state.

There are added advantages which this development can give rise to and such advantages are that civic participation and engagement of the youth can provide youths the opportunities upon which they can gain work experiences, practical maneuvering skills, skills of compromise as well as the inculcation of civic responsible habits that promote the development of the individual and his state. These unfolding developments by implication can positively engage the youth to appreciate the relationship between policy, politics and democracy and their roles in bringing about the best by exploring the three concepts for the advancement of their state. Without any iota of doubt civic

engagement can create awareness in the youths about politics, which Crowther, Martin and Shaw (2009:14) define as “the bottom-up aspirations of people in communities, and the necessity for democratic spaces in which to develop, articulate and pursue them” and policy which the above scholars also define as “the top down imperatives of the state, and the invited spaces they offer for various kinds of managed consultation and partnership” (p.14). It is possible that through civic engagement which citizenship and civic education brings about, youths of a state can learn how the dynamics and workings of democracy can be relied upon in reconciling conflicting issues in the top-down and bottom-up structures involved in governance or arts of state craft and through the same way contribute and modify policy and politics for the effective governance of their state. Again, mechanisms for understanding the fundamental questions that politics preoccupy itself with such as, who gets what? How? and why? can become a thing every youth in the state can be familiar with and the dynamics in which they are resolved can quickly place youths and their state on fast lanes of development without any forms of violence or physical confrontation.

### **Practical pedagogical steps for boosting the interests of youths in citizenship and civic education**

Education has always been appealed to in attempts to sensitize people and bring about changes in their behaviour or introduce innovations that can revolutionize the lives of people and their state. The teacher is usually a force and will continue to be a force in whatever innovations in education. In fact he sits in the driver’s position to direct and implement policy decisions of the state on education. The teacher achieves all that is expected of him through the use of numerous pedagogical approaches.

A pedagogical approach the teacher can develop for promoting or boosting the interests of youths in citizenship and civic education is creatively developing the youths’ ability to be analytical, and critical to issues in the state. Analytical insights and critical mindedness that the teacher can strive to develop in the youths can target providing youths opportunities to existentially make choices in the form of autonomously influencing issues, expressing themselves and participating in positive actions that are geared towards, bringing about changes in the body policy of the state. Such pedagogical innovations can target promoting in youths the ability to abhor irresponsible and unwanted social conformity that has consistently worked against the interests of the youths. The emphasis here is on developing youths’ critical thinking abilities so much that they can question the legality or otherwise of the actions initiated today concerning the welfare of the youths and the citizens generally. Priority in this direction can shape youths into examining their present status in all ramifications and the possibility of realizing the great expectations which the society expects from them. We are all aware that the society looks up to the youths as leaders of tomorrow even when it seems obvious that youths in most societies have lost their today and should something serious not be done, youths may lose their tomorrow.

Another, pedagogical direction that can realistically stimulate the interests of youths in citizenship and civic education is when teachers develop pedagogical innovations that can expose the various sources of bad governance that have stagnated development in Nigeria. By creating this awareness, youths can respond to mechanisms for changing the system either by disassociating themselves from those practices that have brought about bad governance or consciously initiate measures that can lead or sustain good governance.



Pedagogical innovations for boosting the interests of youths in citizenship and civic education can also come in the forms of empowering and enriching youths with the right knowledge especially knowledge of proper moral and contractual relationship between youths and their state. In fact, from the frame of mind of right knowledge, teachers can appeal to youths to explore opportunities in politics by participating in politics and through that way redress their specific and general problems. This is what Aminigo and Nwaokugha (2009:3) mean when they write that:

A curriculum innovation which recognizes the centrality of politics in determining the welfare and general quality of life of a people and equally conscientizes them on this can open up near frontiers for sensitizing the people to participate in politics so as to have a say or a voice in influencing environmental, social, moral, scientific, economic and metaphysical issues affecting their lives. Pedagogical innovations that sensitize the youths into embracing or exploring opportunities offered by participation in politics can work in the favour of the youths. It is a common knowledge that youths constitute a reasonable percentage of the population of Nigeria and democratically, this is a raw material and resource that can be turned into a powerful asset for influencing the political direction of events in the Nigerian state. A pedagogy that sensitizes the youths on this can reverse the present trend where despite constituting the majority, youths in Nigeria do not make any positive impact on the political landscape of Nigeria.

## CONCLUSION

We have in this paper made a case for the development of pedagogical innovations that can stimulate the interests of youths in citizenship and civic education in Nigeria. A case for stimulating the interests of youths in citizenship and civic education deserves its fundamental and basic impetus from the fact that adults in Nigeria are excessively greedy in policy formulation so much that the interests of youths are terribly neglected. Youths as endangered species and as people who are assumed to be the leaders of tomorrow but who unfortunately are left to their predicaments, must consequently be sensitized on strategies for them to change in attitude, behaviour and actions so as to actually claim their rightful place in the society and state.

This is possible as the number of youths in Nigeria can be a force for turning the fortunes of Nigeria in favour of the youths and youths in Nigeria stand the chance of achieving their dreams and heart desires through civic engagement and participation in the various democratic processes that go on from time to time in Nigeria. What promises to translate this into reality is radical but humane pedagogical innovations and re-engineering in the teaching and learning of citizenship and civic education where emphasis can be on putting into real practice those features that can turn the youths into active and patriotic citizens.

There are practical steps youths can take in this direction. Youths can form their own political parties, influence policies in already existing political parties or enter into alliances with political parties whose manifestoes are deep rooted in youths' welfare programmes and youths' development policies. Relatively, youths can establish benchmarks upon which performance of leaders and political parties can be evaluated and in such benchmarks, leaders and political parties that perform abysmally below expectations can be rejected by youths through their votes and those who perform excellently well can be retained in office through their votes. Through this process

of holding leaders and political parties accountable, youths can exercise enormous political powers that can systematically change their lives and the life of everyone in the state in readiness for the youths leading the people and the state and leading them well.

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