

ENHANCING POSITIVE CHANGES IN ELECTORAL PROCESSES IN NIGERIA THROUGH ADULT EDUCATION

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Abstract

This paper focused on issues relating to electoral process in Nigeria and the concerns of adult education in enhancing positive changes into Nigeria electoral process, using Ekiti State as a case study. The paper traced the history and conduct of electoral process in Nigeria, from post-independence period till present day. The paper highlighted some identified issues in the electioneering process in Nigeria, including the conduct of INEC, election malpractices, corruption and fraud, violence, insecurity and other vices. The paper also discussed the concept of adult education and what it tends to achieve in the issue of electoral process in Nigeria, particularly in Ekiti State. It highlighted and discusses the ways by which adult education will tackle the challenges and enhanced positive changes in the democratic and electoral process, by providing educational opportunity for all citizens, organising adult education for the disadvantaged groups, creating awareness and sensitisation for citizens, organising training and workshop for the party members and the electorates and engaging the stakeholders on peace and conflict management education. The paper therefore recommends that the Governments at all levels and all stakeholders should establish adult centers in towns and villages to educate people on the need to engage in free and fair elections. They should also provide adequate security to safeguard elections and enhanced positive changes in the electoral process in the country. Lastly, there should be adequate education, sensitisation, trainings and workshops for citizens on the conduct of electoral process to enhance free and fair election.

Keywords: Adult education, Challenges, Electoral process, Nigeria, Positive changes

Introduction

Electoral process in Nigeria have been an age-long thing, it dated back to September, 20th 1923 with the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) winning the three out of the four elected seats in the Legislative Council (INEC (2006). Since then, there have been many massive move in the process of elections in the country, notably, the Electoral Commission of Nigeria (ECN) was established to conduct the 1959 elections, followed by the Federal Electoral Commission (FEC) in 1960 to conduct the Federal and Regional elections of 1964 and 1965 respectively (Awofeso & Odeyemi 2016). FEC was dissolved after the military Coup of 1966 and replaced with Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) in 1978. The race continued with FEDECO which conducted

the election of 1979 during Obasanjo first regime and that of the general election of the second Republic conducted in 1983 under the leadership of Alhaji Shehu Shagari. In 1995, General Sani Abacha also established the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON) to conduct the Local Government Councils election to National Assembly, but was aborted with the death of General Sani Abacha. Moreover, General Abdulsalam Abubakar administration also established the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) by the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria that ushered in the fourth Republic. Since then, the country has continue to witness different elections conducted by INEC, including 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 at national and state levels in Nigeria (INEC, 2019).

Election generally is an evidence of a true democracy in which members of the communities, organizations, states, legislatives and the nation elects their representatives who would occupy public offices according to the law of the land (Adisa, 2019). Election creates avenue for people to transfer their sovereignty to their preferred candidates to govern the state on their behalf. Electoral process involves comprehensive procedures, involving the planning, preparing and selecting representatives to the local, state and national levels of the governments (INEC (2006). The process covers all the activities relating to the establishment of the law, appointments, selection of candidates, campaigns, trainings, registrations, nomination of candidates, voting, vote counting, declaration of results, all in a bid to ensure free and fair elections (Jaja & Badey 2014). Thus, the importance of election cannot be over-emphasised, it is constitutional and a fundamental human right, a means of providing an electorate with the power to control and choose preferred candidates from the representatives to occupy particular offices and to represent their interest effectively in the government. By implication, there can be no representatives in governments without election. Election also allows people to checkmate the sitting government or change the system from an unpopular and unsupportive government for a better candidate who can guarantee true democracy for them. It is also a way of putting pressure on the electorates to respond to their demand (Afolabi, 2014). Election also enables political power and public office holders to become responsive, adjust their ways of life and their managerial work. Regular election gives people the ability to change the government and replace them in an effort to improve democracy and democratic procedures (Araba & Odunayo, 2015). However, as important as elections have been in the history of any country, particularly in Nigeria, it appears to have lots of issues and challenges over the years. Awofeso & Odeyemi (2016) reflecting

on the history of elections in Nigeria since 1959 till date confirmed that the elections have been characterised with violence and other notable electoral vices. This study established that since 1964, successive elections in Nigeria have all been notorious for obvious widespread acts of hooliganism and vandalism, with attendant loss of lives and property. These, according to the study, have continued unabated, even in the 21st Century when most young democracies in Africa are eschewing violence and other vices during elections. The history of elections in Ekiti State is not so different, Ekiti State was created on October 1, 1996 from the old Ondo State by the late General Sani Abacha during the military regime. The State shares boundaries with Ondo, Osun, Kwara and Kogi States and has 16 Local Government Areas. The LGAs are politically grouped into three senatorial districts, 6 federal constituencies, and 26 State House of Assembly constituencies. Ekiti Central and Ekiti North senatorial districts both have five local governments each, while Ekiti South senatorial district has six local government areas (Omilusi, 2014). Just like other states of the federation, the return of democratic government on 29th May, 1999 made Ekiti State experience five different gubernatorial elections; the first in 1998, the second in 2003, the third in 2007, the fourth in 2014 and the fifth in 2018 (Ilori, 2020). The study reveals that the elections were characterised by peace and violence. According to the study, the first election held in 1998 was peacefully conducted by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and supervised by the then outgoing military Head-of-State Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar (Rtd). However, the subsequent gubernatorial elections conducted by democratically elected governments were marred by series of electoral violence and security challenges ranging from ballot boxes snatching, stuffing, intimidation of opposition candidates, killings, votes buying to votes rigging.

Some of the issues and challenges found to be peculiar to electoral processes in Nigeria and Ekiti State in particular includes, lack of credibility in the conducts of INEC. In the history of elections in Nigeria, INEC have always been accused of lacking credibility in its capacity to conduct free and fair elections. Alfred & Ejalonibu (2019) reported that lots of stakeholders have repeatedly accused INEC of partiality in all ramifications before and after the elections of 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015 respectively for colluding with the ruling political party to orchestrate disenfranchisement of qualified voters, vote buying and bribery, falsification of results, intimidation and harassment of party representatives, suspected opposition party followers, hijack/snatching of electoral materials, ballot stuffing, underage and multiple voting as well as forgery and issuance of

fake election result sheets. Corroborating this, Aiyede (2021) in a review of 2019 election stated that the election came in for a heavy dose of criticism on the grounds that INEC elections were not totally free and fair. It was revealed that there were interferences with the results collated by the political party agents and security agencies with the connivance of electoral commission officials. It was also confirmed that the total number of registered voters announced before the election and the figures announced by electoral commission during the collation in 30 out of the 36 states were inconsistent. Adisa (2019) also decries that INEC's is found of the practice of distributing materials on the day of the election, and often results in the late arrival of voting materials in some areas, especially those that are not close in proximity to urban centers. And that late commencement of the exercise of voting often leads to voters ignoring voting entirely.

Moreover, corruption and impunity have eaten deep into every sector of the economy in Nigeria, and have manifested in the manipulation of electoral process in Nigeria. Muhammed, Yahaya and Musa (2018) identified electoral corruptions to be compilation of fictitious names on voter's registers, illegal compilation of separate voters' lists, illegal printing of voter's cards and illegal possessions of ballot boxes. Others include stuffing of ballot boxes with ballot papers before election dates, falsifications of election results, declaration of false results and the likes. According to the study, one major dimension of corruption that has crippled the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria is political corruption which include the abuse of trusted power by political leaders for personal gains. It has also been aptly captured that, corruption in this democratic dispensation has been pervasive, open and shameless (Yusuf & Zaheruddin 2016). In like manner, Adisa (2019) also reported that since 2007, the general elections in Ekiti State have been marred due to the institutionalised election fraud in Nigeria, conducting credible, transparent, free and fair elections has been one of the major problems and a threat to the democratic transition in Nigeria. The implications of this act manifest in the electoral violence, rigging and persistence destruction of lives and properties in the country.

Another issue is the electoral malpractices which can be described as all forms of illegalities perpetrated by government, electoral officers, political parties, organisations or people with disastrous purpose to influence election in favour of their candidates (Moses, 2016). Electoral malpractice has been the bane of the nation's democracy since Independence in 1960 to the return of democracy in 1999 and still continues till today. It comes in form of election winning through manipulation in favour

of a candidate, rigging, monetary inducement, violence against political opponents and the likes. It also includes intimidation of the opponents, ballot snatching and destruction of lives and property (Aiyede 2021). This is coupled with poor logistics and late supply of electoral materials by INEC in some cases, which often results in delays and creates room for malpractices. On the just concluded governorship election in Ekiti State, the Inter-Party Advisory Council (IPAC) decries the high rates of malpractices involved in the election (Online Tribune 2022). The report declared some outrageous vote-buying and sundry electoral malpractices. It was confirmed that the election witnessed voter apathy thereby putting the legality of the electoral process in question. The IPAC National Chairman, Engr. Yabagi Yusuf Sani also decries that there was a high incidence of vote-trading between electorates and political actors in open connivance, including Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) officials and security agents who aided and abetted the crime. The Ekiti State Gubernatorial election was an obvious demonstration of a new parlance and style in inducing electorate. The zenith of it is the security operatives' deliberate allowance of a high level of open vote buying, which the PDP Agents accused the APC of doing "see and buy" implying that the voters have to show the APC operatives (agents) their ballot paper to confirm they voted for the party before being paid (Online Tribune 2018). The level of vote buying in this election has become a subject of public discourse generating intense debate far more than before. This problems tends to dilute the capacity of election to peacefully transfer political power and to legitimise political power.

Electoral violence can also be described as physical or psychological struggles calculated to inflict discomfort on the other party. Electoral violence is any forms of physical force applied by an individuals or group of people to disorganise the electoral process, thereby destroying the electoral materials or intimidating the electorates to vote against their wishes. Violence has often been used by dubious politicians to achieve their aims and objectives, particularly when they realise that the democratic process may not place them in the positions of authority desired. According to Awofeso & Odeyemi (2016), the general elections in Nigeria have continued to witness several manifestations of political violence since 1964, either before or after the elections. The nature and character of the election related violence includes the wholesome rigging of election, manipulation of election results, assassination of political opponents, cases of irregularities, etc. Violence according to them are prevalence in Nigerian politics because political class relies heavily on political power in order to

accumulate wealth fraudulently, and since there is no other economic base for them, they have to resorts to rigging of elections, assassination of political opponents and the likes to remain in power. In addition, Adisa (2019) opined that the factors responsible for electoral violence in Nigeria includes poor electoral administration, rigging, ethnicity, religious sentiments, and the poor security system during elections, political intolerance, and lack of well-defined ideology by the political parties, chronic economic crises and poverty. Adisa (2019) posit that young people are vulnerable when it comes to the issue of violence in an election, as they are been used as instruments of electoral violence because of their vulnerability as unemployed, impoverished, non-literates or school dropouts. This supports Abubakar & Mukhtar (2016) which confirmed that young people have difficulty in making decisions when money is involved in an election, thus, the politicians capitalises on the poverty level and the needs of the young people, especially, the Youths to engage them in anti-social behaviours, including electoral malpractice and assort.

Furthermore, security is indeed indispensable to the conduct of free, fair and credible elections. It is very crucial for creating enabling environments for electoral officers to carry out their duties and in ensuring that voters exercise their civic duties without fear or hindrance and to ensuring a level playing field for all political parties and for other numerous stakeholders to discharge their responsibilities under the Constitution and the Electoral Act. Security is also critical and needed in the protection of electoral personnel, for protecting domestic and foreign observers in discharging their duties and obligations, in maintaining the overall integrity of the democratic and electoral process. On the contrary, the processes of elections in Nigeria have always been marked with series of insecurity, ranges from malpractices, activities of mercenaries, kidnapping, killing, intimidation, arson and other criminal conducts. This condition often makes it unsafe for people to participate in electoral process and at the same time scare them from exercising their franchise. Awofeso & Odeyemi (2016) described insecurity in Nigerian elections as a serious challenge to sustain violence-free election and electoral process, especially in the face of rising societal insecurity pervading the polity. The security report on 2018 Governorship election in Ekiti State pointed out the issue of inadequate security measures in the state and it clearly indicates the reasons for problems of ballot snatching, intimidation of voters and other actions of electoral manipulations that were high (Adisa, 2019). The failure to check these excesses made the politicians to often attack polling units where they perceive defeats in order to ensure cancellation. This finding portends great implications on the sanctity of the

electoral process in the state as it makes the electorate and the electoral umpire vulnerable to all forms of attacks and intimidation from politicians and political thugs. The activities of these malicious people ultimately frustrates the election processes in the state and makes it inconclusive while the result is perceived unfavorable.

Ways of Enhancing Positive Changes into Electoral Process in Nigeria

Education generally is a powerful instrument for all round development, and a way of empowering individuals to development themselves and their environments. Adult education, which is an important aspect of the general education has achieved a lot in the development of individuals and the nation at large. The importance of Adult education in enhancing positive changes into the Nigeria electoral process cannot be over-emphasised. It has continue to acts as agents of change, agents of liberation and create awareness and sensitisation for citizens. It is the education for critical consciousness and creates adjustment in individuals, in that, it allows the recipients to take full responsibility for his or her social, economic and politica actions. The programmes of adult education includes but not limited to adult basic literacy political education, remedial education, civic education, vocational education and community education. Adult education programmes educate citizens on how to bring sanity into the electoral process in Nigeria and Ekiti State in particular.

However, this paper present the some strategies that can enhance positive changes, credible, free and fair electoral process in Nigeria through the programmes of adult education which has play major roles in addressing the issues of illiteracy, poverty and socio-economic problems in the nation. Adult education involves educating the populace and people of mature minds including adults and the youths to widen their horizons in all matters, especially on political education. More importantly, adult education has been a formidable tool for promoting democracy and good governance. UNESCO (1997) summed up the definitions of adult education to mean the key to the 21st Century, a condition for full participation in the society, a powerful concept for sustainable development, an aid for promoting democracy, justice and gender equality. Adult education is dynamic in nature, it enhances the skills and knowledge needed by individuals to perform all tasks. In essence, engaging adults and youths in adult education programmes, such as adult basic education, remedial education, civic and political education, vocational education, women education, community education, etc.

will enhance their understanding on true democracy and help them to participate actively in the political process of the country.

Another strategy is organising literacy education programmes for the disadvantaged groups. The National Policy on Education (NPE 2014) clearly stated the roles of adult education, particularly concerning the disadvantaged groups in the society. Section 4 of the Policy stated that adult education would: “Provide Functional Basic Education for adults and youths who have never had the opportunity of formal education, or who left the school early. The target groups include; the migrants, almajiris, the non-literates and semi-illiterates’ adults and youths, adolescents and other categories of disadvantaged groups”. These sets of people should be given access to adult education programmes and other well-meaning Nigerians, who, as a result of illiteracy, poverty and unemployment status, could be easily bought or bribed to rig elections and commit other electoral crimes in Nigeria. It is observed by the researcher that the elites and the highly placed individuals in the society, do not always participate in voting, probably because of the notion that the conducts of the young illiterates people who behaves as touts. Moreover, some of the less privileged people, such as the handicaps, women in purdahs, the migrants etc, may not understand the process of election because they have not being in the four walls of the classrooms. The programmes of adult education including, adult basic literacy political education, remedial education, civic education, vocational education and community education will help to change their orientation and thinking, and at the same time redirect them towards supporting free and fair electoral processes in the country. And if these sets of people have basic knowledge of education, they will not become electoral thugs or politician tools, and sell their votes and their conscience for the manipulation of elections in the country.

Moreover, creating awareness and disseminating information about political enlightenments in the country is another strategy. This is done to provide adequate education for the citizens about elections and other matters. Echezue, Amadike & Eleberi (2020) confirmed that there is a strong link between adult learning and democracy, stating that adult education creates a forum for togetherness and helps to share political ideas for active participation in all aspect of the governance. Thus, the programmes of adult education, such as civic and political education and community education will help to create awareness and sensitise the people on the need to get involved in electoral process and civic governance in the country. The advocacy process and strategies on elections carried out through community sensitisations established that 64% of Nigeria’s population inhabits rural

communities (Ifeanacho, Ochim, Udegbonam & Chukwuji 2020). Organising community meetings which is the primary function of adult education has help to raise people's consciousness, make them aware of their fundamental rights and problems, to the extent of motivating them to take actions on how to tackle them. Through community forum, citizens would understand that one way through which the leaders can be held responsible for their actions is through election and that with adequate education, they have the power to install or remove leaders who fail to meet their needs and aspirations.

Not these alone, organising regular training and workshops for voters on the need to understand the guidelines and principles of electoral activities has been part of adult education programmes. This is done by educating the citizens on how to go about voting and encouraging their involvement and participation. This is important because the non-literates and even, some enlightened personalities do not know the rules and regulations guiding INEC conducts of elections. And it was discovered that INEC as a body do not really have enough time to educate the populace or that the education given to people on the issue of voting is coming rather late (Awofeso & Odeyemi 2016). This situation was decried by IPAC on the effort of educating the people of Ekiti ahead of the Governorship election of Saturday 18th, June 2022 that despite the efforts of the group and the numerous stakeholders/volunteers on massive voter education, the election was still characterized by brazen and outrageous vote-buying, sundry electoral malpractices and voter apathy thereby putting in question the legality of the process (Online Tribune 2022). The reason for this was probably, the education came rather too late and was not carried out by experts. Thus, to put an end to this issue of electoral malpractices, adult education stakeholders and experts must take the responsibility of providing adequate voting guides and voter's education for the citizens to know how to go about the process of election to discourage election malpractices and other vices. They must also engage in regular sensitizations to encourage the populace to elect good representatives, collect their permanent voter' card (PVC) and cast their vote wisely. The importance of voter's education as described by Ucho & Osundina (2019) includes aiming at creating a climate of knowledgeable participation by all potential voters in an election. It also seeks to enable potential voters to cast their vote with confidence and achieve stipulated objective. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) should be adequately employed in the training of respective voters in Nigeria. Conducting election using ICT will definitely control election rigging and other forms of malpractices.

Engaging stakeholders in peace and conflict management education is yet another strategy. Conflicts had been, and will continue to exist in the contemporary Nigeria, particularly on the issues relating to politics and electoral processes, resulting in demonstrations, destructions of lives and property, killing, arson and most of the times leading to religion and inter-tribal wars. To forestall these, adult education programmes are made available for the stakeholders, the Government, INEC, Party members, Community leaders and the general public to establish synergy on the need to embrace peace and unity as the basis for promoting democracy and good governance in the nation. Adult education also engages the governments, INEC and other political parties on how to safeguard and strengthen the election processes. The program help to work on the relevant stakeholders to engage in the transparency, collation and transmission of election results, verification of voters, voting and counting of votes in order to curb the issue of electoral malpractices and violence. Thus, political education, peace and conflict management education provided by adult education will help guide the necessary stakeholders against election malpractice, violence and post-election utterances that are capable of inciting genocide.

Conclusion

Governments at all levels should establish adult education programmes in towns and villages to provide basic education for citizens on the conduct of successful elections in Nigeria. Also, there should be adequate sensitisation of people on electoral process, civic and political education, particularly, the non-literates, adult population, the disadvantaged groups and youths who are susceptible to electoral malpractices. Lastly, government and stakeholders should provide adequate security to safeguard elections in Nigeria to avoid violence, election malpractices and other vices.

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