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Secondary School Prefects' Democratic Competences in Akure City, Nigeria

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Abstract

This research work was carried out to unravel democratic cultural competence of senior secondary school students-prefects in Akure City, Ondo State, Nigeria. Three hundred and ninety (390) senior secondary school prefects from twenty-eight (28) secondary schools participated in this study and the data collected were analysed using simple tables, frequency count, graphs, percentages and mean deviation. According to the study findings, it was found that the school prefects possessed high level of democratic knowledge, values, attitude and the school prefects' interest in politics was high while their democratic skills was moderate. This is not the focus of this paper. Therefore, this study recommended that secondary schools' administration should be all inclusive in such a way that it will afford students the opportunity of participating in the decision-making process, while teachers should create a friendly and democratic learning environment where the interest of the learners is the centre-piece of the learning activities by emphasizing students-centred methods of teaching.

Keywords: Democratic practices, Democratic attitudes, Democratic values, Democratic skills, Secondary school prefects in Akure

Introduction

The purpose of education in a democracy is to produce participating democratic citizens who are trained to make the basic decisions about who will lead the country. To educate is to prepare someone in the necessary skills to have the ability to participate in society as a full citizen. Therefore, there is symbiotic relationship between education and democracy. Education being a prerequisite for the survival and success of the society, education is given primacy as it plays a significant role in how the country will run, it is vital that democratic values such as liberty, equality, cooperation, sharing of responsibility, and justice are taught to make learning more effective, relevant, and useful. These ideals are essential to maintaining and improving a functional democracy in not only the United States, but in any of the emerging democracies. As Franklin D. Roosevelt once said, "Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely. The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education." (qtd. in Editors, 1)

Students' prefectship is an important aspect of school administration that cannot be underestimate. Leadership is about the art of motivating, influencing, and directing people so that they work together to achieve the goals of a team or broader organisation. It's important for students to experience leadership opportunities

during their schooling, to learn the art of building relationships within teams, defining identities, and achieving tasks effectively. Therefore, student leadership is a student in the position to influence, motivate, and guide others toward achievement of a goal. The student must be in an elected or appointed position of leadership and serve for a minimum of one academic year. However, it is uncalled for, that most of the school prefects are ignorance of their duties and roles as students' representatives therefore, found wanting of their expected roles in the school administration. Their failure of not living up to the students and school management expectation may be owing to the lack of proper orientation as regards their prefectship roles.

Medium of selecting prefects in secondary schools needs a cursory look in an attempt to understand the democratic culture competence. Students are key stakeholders in educational organizations and therefore need proper and adequate representation in the institutions' management. Some schools embrace democratic participation by given the students to elect their own representatives in the Students' Representative Council while some schools adopt selection mode where the school management select the prefect based on the recommendation of the teachers and the students' remarks as regard the personality of the prospective prefects.

People with good knowledge of democracy will promote democratization and display good democratic attitude and display democratic skills which will promote popular participation and in turn guaranteed a democratic political dispensation. The adequate democratic knowledge is pertinent to socio-economic development and political stability in any given country. It will be difficult if not impossible for any country with low level democratic knowledgeable citizens to experience steady democratization and political stability. Therefore, the onus of inculcating, promoting and propagating the knowledge of democracy lies with the agents of socialization in the society which include among others; institution of learning, political parties, religious institutions, family, mass media etc.

Democratic attitudes determine the level of democracy in one's life. In developing a democratic attitude, the community, the family and the school have a very important place. Democracy cannot be learned without experiencing it. If the individuals cannot find the medium in their personal and social lives to experience and practice the values and principles, which are tried to be taught in the name of democracy, it's not possible to expect them to become truly democratic people, Sisman (2006). Democracy can survive and develop only in the societies composed of individuals having internalized democracy as a course of conduct and implementing democratic principles in their lives. Democratic class environments influence the student in a positive way and contribute to them in the acquirement of democratic attitudes and behavior. Students who are actively involved in the learning process, who take responsibility and express their opinions comfortably, learn more meaningfully as posited by Duman and Koç (2004). Such students will exhibit attitudes towards democracy and uphold the democratic principles in their day-to-day activities while dealing with other members of the society. One of the attitudes of good citizens is to have knowledge of democratic attitudes.

Democratic values support the belief that an orderly society can exist in where freedom is preserved and there is a supremacy of the constitution. But order and freedom must be balanced as to check the excesses of both the ruler and the ruled. When considering the sources of

democratic values, decades of research point to education as their strongest and most consistent predictor (Miller, 2017). There are several ways in which education could make individuals more democratically oriented, many of them indirect. Some researchers emphasize the cognitive benefits of education including improved access to information and the ability to process and use that information when making judgments (Marks, 2013). Educated individuals have better knowledge of the political system and the role of individual institutions and can more accurately evaluate their performance.

Democratic skills are capacities to understand political activities very well and be grounded politically by tolerating other people's views and accommodating other people's differences as this will promote peaceful co-existence and popular participation which are the core principles of democracy. The autonomy of the education sector seeks to condition schools so that principals, teachers have a great responsibility in improving the quality of the learning process to improve the quality of learning outcomes, noble, healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, reaching citizens who are democratic, critical of the development of science and technology and responsible for themselves, the environment, the nation and state (Article 3 Depdiknas, 2003). Citizens who have democratic skills are citizens who have a democratic attitude. Having critical thinking skills, or the ability to think skillfully can build a democratic individual. Sudarman (2013), asserted that someone who is not able to think openly will give rise to the potential that creates conflicts with other people.

People who are not trained with good thinking skills, will position themselves as the owner of the best thinking, and consider others, owners of poor thinking skills. Someone who is not accustomed to the discussion, or debate, or dialogue, will consider himself the best owner of thought (Sudarman, 2013: 35). Therefore, analytical skills, good communication skills, life coping skill will not only aid democracy but enhance democratization in the society and these skills can be inculcated into the young ones through education. Critical thinking skills and democratic attitudes are the results of an educational process. In many countries, the need

for democratic education in schools to shape citizens' democratic attitudes is important and urgent as a solution to the problems of the modern world today. Democratic education has the aim of forming thinking skills, expressing thoughts freely, neatly, concisely and respecting the minds of others (Sanli and Altun, 2015: 2-3). Much has been done on students' civic responsibility, students' political education, democratization process in Nigeria but little could be said to have been done on students democratic competence, most especially, democratic competence of senior secondary school prefects as predictors of their interest in politics have not been empirically investigated. Therefore, this study will fill the research vacuum.

Statement of the Problem

Student leadership in secondary schools is considered as part of the decision-making process in the schools. Prefects are representative of students in school's committee. The above observation shows that students do not have a clear idea of what their duties are despite the fact that they have gone through orientation. This situation is not different in many secondary schools in Nigeria. In most of the schools, when students get elected as prefects are given little or no orientation on the principles of students' leadership. Therefore, this study is an effort to test the democratic competence as predictor of senior secondary school students-prefects' political interest in Akure City (Akure North and Akure South Local Government Areas), Ondo State. This problem has not been empirically investigated in Akure City, hence, this study is an effort to fill the research gap.

Significance of the Study

This study will be of immense benefit to all stakeholders in education such as students, researchers, educationists, parents, government and school administrators. It is hoped that this study will be an eye opener for the school prefects to know their roles and functions as school prefect. It will also help the teachers and school management to know the essence of students' participation in the school administration while the country at large will be furnished with adequate

information on how the schools can serve as training ground for the future leaders that will display high level of democratic culture competence. The findings, recommendations and suggestions of this study will also serve as a basis for further research work.

Methods and Materials

The research design in this study is survey research design. An attempt was made to determine the opinion of respondents on the democratic cultural competence of senior secondary school students-prefects in Akure City of Ondo State. The target population for this study consisted of all the secondary schools' prefects in Akure North and Akure South Local Government Areas of Ondo State. Twenty-eight schools were randomly selected. A total number of 390 secondary school prefects were sampled for this study through random sampling technique. The research instrument used in this was a set of structured questionnaire on Secondary School Prefects' Democratic Competence (QSSPDC). Test-retest reliability study was conducted.

Theoretical Framework

Democratic Theory by John Dewey (1916)

The overriding theme of Dewey's works was his profound belief in democracy, be it in politics, education, or communication and journalism. Dewey considered two fundamental elements—schools and civil society—to be major topics needing attention and reconstruction to encourage experimental intelligence and plurality. He asserted that complete democracy was to be obtained not just by extending voting rights but also by ensuring that there exists a fully formed public opinion, accomplished by communication among citizens, experts and politicians, with the latter being accountable for the policies they adopt. Therefore, education is a means of internalizing democratic culture in any given society. If the sole aim of education, be it formal or informal is to transmit the culture, norms, traditions, and values of a given society from one generation to another therefore, education is the viable mean of achieving democratization in the country and social regeneration. Democracy must be institutionalized right from the school and its

values and principles must be inculcated into the young ones as to build a democratic society where rule of law, popular sovereignty, respect for

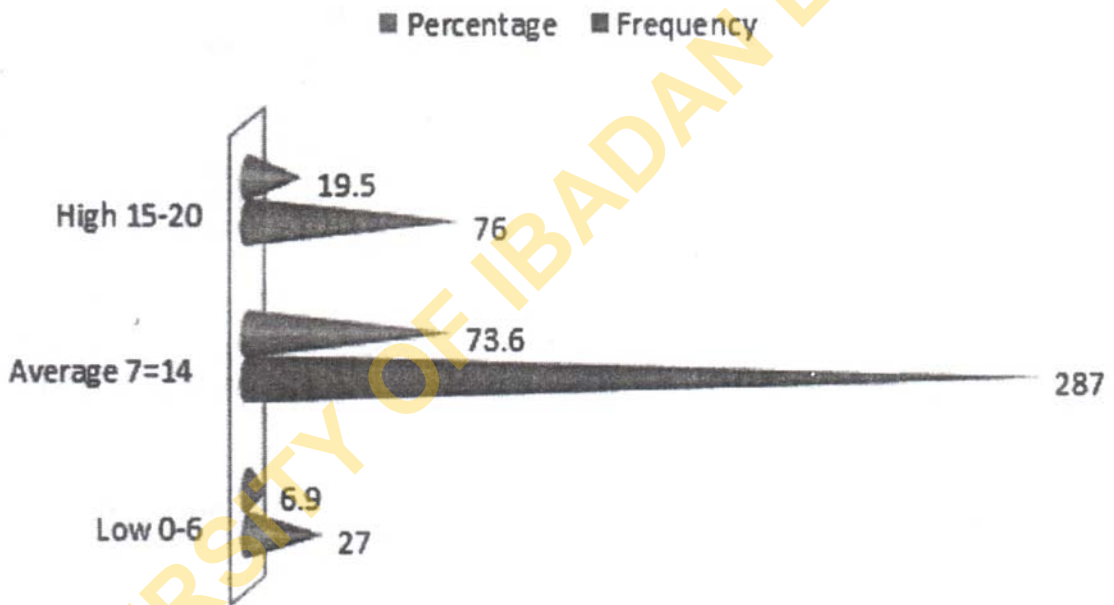
fundamental human rights and freedom of press will be upheld in high esteem.

Data Analysis

Research Question 1: What is the level of school prefects' democratic knowledge?

Graph 4.2: Mean Responses of School Prefects' Democratic Knowledge

Students' Democratic Knowledge



Source: field work 2022

The above graph 4.1 shows the responses of school prefects' democratic knowledge. It reveals a weighted average level of 73.6 percentage which represents 287 frequency 19.5

percentage of 76 respondents and 6.9 percentage of 27 respondents. This implies that the school prefects' democratic knowledge was moderate.

Research Question 2: What is the level of school prefects' democratic attitude?**Table 4.1: Mean Responses of School Prefects' Democratic Attitude**

S/ N	Items	SA	A	A	SD		Std
1.	I do not believe in giving bribe	96 24.6	179 45.9	110 28.2	5 1.3	2.94	.760
2.	I see strength in unity	187 47.9	186 47.7	13 3.3	4 1.0	3.43	.611
3.	Cooperation facilitate development in the society	159 40.8	202 51.8	28 7.2	1 0.3	3.33	.618
4.	Selfless service is not necessary in the society	118 30.3	133 34.1	131 33.6	8 2.1	2.93	.847
5.	Selfishness is necessary to achieve greatly	188 48.2	153 39.2	47 11.8	3 0.8	3.35	.714
6.	Collective decision -making process is better than dictatorship	150 38.5	161 41.3	69 17.7	10 2.6	3.16	.801
7.	I do not believe violence to achieve a goal	204 52.3	116 29.7	48 12.3	22 5.6	3.29	.890
8.	I show my fellow students love to achieve peaceful co-existence	171 43.8	142 36.4	55 14.1	22 5.6	3.18	.879
9.	It is my civic responsibility to vote	144 36.9	147 37.7	72 18.5	27 6.9	3.05	.911
10.	I pray for our political leaders everyday	67 17.2	60 15.4	234 60.0	29 7.4	2.42	.859
11.	I am proud to be a citizen of Nigeria	204 52.3	120 30.8	43 11.0	23 5.9	3.29	.886
12.	I believe Nigeria will be great	224 57.4	105 26.9	39 10.0	22 5.6	3.36	.878
13.	Tolerance enhances the acceptability of different views	154 39.5	155 39.7	55 14.1	26 6.7	3.12	.889
14.	I am open to constructive discussion	134 34.4	141 36.2	77 19.7	38 9.7	2.95	.965
15.	Contesting for an election is not my way	40 10.3	44 11.3	271 69.5	35 9.0	2.23	.750
Weighted Mean: 3.07		Threshold: 2.5					

Table 4.2 shows the responses of school prefects' democratic attitude. It reveals a weighted average of 3.07 which is higher than the threshold of 2.5. This implies that the school prefects' democratic attitude was high.

Research Question 3: What is the level of School prefects' democratic Value?**Table 4.2: Mean Responses of Students' Democratic value**

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD		Std
1.	Rule of law should be upheld always	190 48.7	109 27.9	53 13.6	38 9.7	3.16	.995
2.	Disputes in the society should be resolved peacefully	129 33.1	150 38.5	65 16.7	46 11.8	2.93	.983
3.	I put other people's interest first	145 37.2	110 28.2	79 20.3	56 14.4	2.88	1.07
4.	I like to be fair in my dealing with people	123 31.5	91 23.3	148 37.9	28 7.2	2.79	.970
5.	I love writing articles on political issues	144 36.9	143 36.7	63 16.2	40 10.3	3.00	.971
6.	I like to adhere to the stipulated rules and regulations	140 35.9	125 32.1	82 21.0	43 11.0	2.93	1.00
7.	I believe in teamwork	61 15.6	116 29.7	170 43.6	43 11.0	2.50	.886
8.	Feedbacks has always made stronger in carrying out my tasks	135 34.6	104 26.7	87 22.3	64 16.4	2.79	1.09
9.	I ventilate my political ideas through social media	172 44.1	105 26.9	77 19.7	36 9.2	3.06	1.00
10.	I like attending political meeting and rallies to gain competence	141 36.2	139 35.6	79 20.3	31 7.9	3.00	.940
Weighted Average: 2.9		Threshold: 2.5					

Source: fieldwork 2022

Table 4.2 shows the responses of school prefects' democratic value. It reveals a weighted average of 2.9 which is higher than the threshold of 2.5. This implies that the school prefects' democratic value was high.

Research Question 4: What is the level of Students' Democratic Skills?**Table 4.3: Mean Responses of Students' Democratic Skills Scale**

S/N	Items	Exc	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor	\bar{x}	Std
1.	I like to analyze issues while considering others' interest	21 5.4	221 256	97 24.9	31 7.9	20 5.1	3.49	.909
2.	Jumping into conclusion is against belief	4 1.0	153 39.2	151 38.7	55 14.	27 6.9	3.13	.914
3.	I believe in teamwork	4 1.0	138 35.4	144 36.9	65 16.7	39 10.0	3.01	.982
4.	I participate actively in group discussion	4 1.0	32 8.2	42 10.8	277 71.0	35 9.0	2.21	.758
5.	I feel concerned whenever my classmates are disturbed	4 1	182 46.7	115 29.5	58 14.9	31 7.9	3.18	.972
6.	I like to communicate my ideas	21 5.4	148 37.9	125 32.1	71 18.2	25 6.4	3.18	1.00
7.	In most cases, I like to mediate on issues among students.	15 3.8	112 28.7		225 57.7	38 9.7	2.31	.800
8.	Listening to people's opinion is not necessary	10 2.6	144 36.9	100 25.6	88 22.6	48 12.3	2.95	1.09
9.	I prefer few people committee on certain issues	3 0.8	139 35.6	117 30.0	100 25.6	31 7.9	2.96	.981
10.	Addressing students' welfare gives me joy	4 1.0	152 39.0	115 29.5	94 24.1	25 6.4	3.04	.964
11.	I derive pleasure in debating political and public issues	4 1.0	161 41.3	109 27.9	72 18.5	44 11.3	3.02	1.05
12.	I like to listen to students' complaints with rapt attention	4 1.0	154 39.5	108 27.7	87 22.3	37 9.5	3.00	1.02
13.	I am active member of sensitization groups	4 1.0	140 35.9	113 29.0	86 22.1	47 12.1	2.92	1.05
14.	I like comparing different tenure of political administration	4 1.0	201 51.5	114 29.2	53 13.6	18 4.6	3.31	.886
15.	I like comparing different tenure of political administration	13 3.3	149 38.2	154 39.5	49 12.6	25 6.4	3.19	.928
Weighted Average: 2.99		Threshold: 3.0						

Table 4.3 shows the responses of school prefects' democratic skills. It reveals a weighted average of 2.99 (approx. 3.00) which is equal to the threshold of 3.0. This implies that the school prefects' democratic skills were moderate.

Discussion of Results

School Prefects' Democratic Knowledge

The finding of this study revealed the level of school prefects' democratic knowledge at average level of 73.6 percentage which represents 287 respondents out of total number of 390 secondary school prefects sampled for this study.

This implies that the democratic knowledge of secondary school prefect is moderate and is it healthy to Nigerian democratization processes. This could be due to the fact that while testing the democratic competence of the school prefects through an achievement test of twenty items which was designed to test the knowledge of the school prefects on fundamental rights, political system in operation, principles and merits of democracy, organisation of political parties, voting education, forms of political participation and viability of public opinion in the society, the students' performance was averagely impressive.

However, the prefectship position as a factor can not be taken as the only factor responsible for the democratic knowledge and competence but conglomeration of other factors such as inclusion and introduction of civic education subject into secondary school curriculum, government subject, activities of the political leaders, political education, operation of civil societies, e.t.c. The secondary school prefects have the fundamental rudiments of democratic process and how to participate in it. It must be noted that democracy and education are intertwined because without proper understanding of concept of democracy and its working principles, it will be practically impossible for students to exhibit any level of democratic competence in the society. Therefore, education plays a vital role in building a democratic and all-inclusive nation. The school prefect must have the knowledge of their role and duties as school prefects and exhibit high level of competence as to live up to expectations in the school and later in life.

School Prefects' Democratic Attitude

The result of this study showed that school prefects' democratic attitude weighted average of 3.07 which is higher than the threshold of 2.5. This implies that the school prefects' democratic attitude was high. This finding is in tandem with some other studies such as; Arslan and Çalmaşur, 2017; Özbey and Sarıçam, 2018 and Cırık, 2015 posited that democratic attitude of pre-service teachers are high level in some studies, other research results have been reached medium and lower levels (Gürgen, 2017; Polat, 2015; Tomul, Çelik and Tas, 2012). This could be the result of classroom setting, socio-economic background of the students, teachers' perception on students' rights and type of system of government being practiced in the country. According to Arie Perliger, Daphna Canetti-Nisim and Ami Pedahzur (2007) posited in their studies that civic education classes, when conducted in a democratic classroom climate, can help to promote democratic attitudes and behaviours. However, it must be noted that formal inclusion of civic education in the secondary school curriculum in Nigeria is not a strong indication of building students' democratic attitude but giving the students' opportunity to be

incorporated into the school administration and decision-making body through students' prefectorial system will have a crucial effect on the students' democratic attitude which will foster unity, religion tolerance, national integration, respect for rule of laws and openness which are the hallmarks of democratic society.

Students' Democratic value

The finding established that secondary school prefects' democratic value is high and this is hinged on the school prefects' knowledge of democracy and democratic processes embedded in extra-curricular activities. It is pertinent to note that a school with democratic administrative principles where students' opinions count and influence the school policies tends to foster right democratic values in the students and shape students' ideas about democracy. The teaching of value-oriented subjects such as civic education, social studies, government etc is instrumental towards the inculcation of right democratic values and principles into the students and this will foster students' active political participation and thereby arose the democratic consciousness in the minds of Nigerian secondary school students.

This finding is closely related to the submission of Kula, S. S. and Aytaç, T. (2022) in their study titled "comparative analysis of democratic attitude and value perceptions of school administrators, teachers, preservice teachers and students: A meta-analysis study" where they opined that, teachers and pre-service teachers have higher perceptions of democratic attitudes and values than school administrators and especially students. However, they went further to state that Students were observed to have the lowest level of democratic attitude and value perceptions and this contradict the finding of this study which submits that secondary school prefects' democratic value is high. This could be due to the high level of political apathy, failed political promises and inherent problem of bribery and corruption which have become intertwined problems eating deep Nigerian socio-economic and political systems. In a heterogeneous country like Nigeria, democratic values like tolerance, sportsmanship, transparency, co-operation, love e.t.c. should be emphasized and taught at all levels of education with all intents and purposes.

Students' Democratic Skills Scale

The fourth finding of this study also revealed that majority of the secondary school prefects possessed moderate democratic skills as some of them belong to different social clubs in their schools such as debate and quiz group, human rights group, sensitization group and so on, therefore, the democratic skill of the secondary school prefects is high. This result is contrary to the finding of Foa and Mounk 2016, 2017; Global Barometer Surveys 2018; Howe 2017 where they posited that citizens' support for democracy has declined, while openness to illiberal and authoritarian alternatives has increased. This implies that the secondary school prefects possess good interpersonal relationship skill which help them to maintain a cordial relationship with their teachers, school authorities and their fellow students. It must be noted that the responses of the respondents on the research question one, indicate that the school prefects have good communication skills as this is one of the yardsticks for the selection of the school prefects in most of the secondary schools in Akure North and Akure South Local Government Areas and by extension Nigeria. This could be so due to the fact that democracy is no longer seen as one of the forms of government but as a modern way of life owing to the warmth embrace of democracy across continents and the general acceptability of democratic government in almost all African countries.

Conclusion

This study submitted that democratic cultural competence of secondary school prefects in Akure North and Akure South Local Government Areas of Ondo State, Nigeria, appear to be moderate because the students possess high democratic knowledge, values, attitudes and while their democratic skills was at moderate level. This study also concludes that to a very large extent, the school prefects' democratic knowledge is impressive and the school prefects possess good communication skills. Therefore, student with adequate democratic knowledge develops interest in politics and later in future become a productive member of the society. In the same vein, this study submits that school prefects should be selected

through democratic process as to make the prefects accountable to the generality of students they are representing and to give room for transparency. In addition, the school prefects should be given leadership training occasionally to make them aware of their roles as prefects and live up to expectation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are offered as elixir.

1. Secondary schools' administration should be all inclusive in such a way that it will afford students the opportunity of participating in the decision-making process
2. The process of selecting school prefects should be democratic in nature in such a way that the generality of students will determine who will represent and govern them as school prefects through election.
3. The agents of political socialization such as; family, schools, religious institutions, political parties, mass media should live up to the task of instilling and inculcating right democratic skills and values into their adherents.
4. The school authorities should expose the school prefects to leadership training seldomly to acquaint the students with their prefectship roles in order to live up to expectations.
5. Teachers should create a friendly and democratic learning environment where the interest of the learners is the centre-piece of the learning activities by emphasizing students-centred methods of teaching.

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