

Full Length Research Paper

Political education through the university: a survey of Nigerian university students

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The higher institutions are known for where ideologies are formed. They also serve as instruments of motivating students. Tertiary education in particular is fundamental to the construction of knowledge and knowledge itself has become a vital factor for political education. Nigerian students are politically active and have in no small measure influenced policies within their universities and in the nation as a whole. Nigerian universities have produced a lot of activists that are presently influencing the Nigerian political landscape. These activists have been known to have developed their political ideologies and activism while in the university. The major objective of this study is to determine whether in reality universities play a role in political education of students. A number of factors, such as, curriculum, media, peer influence and lecturers' influence are also used to determine the agents of political socialization of the students within the university. The study also highlighted which of the agents seem to have the greatest impact on the students' political education within the university. The study design is survey research using a questionnaire tagged "Political Education of Students in the University" (PESUQ). The study population is Obafemi Awolowo University. The university is selected because it is deemed to be one of the most politically active among Nigerian universities. The study sample is 1,000 students. 536 new students and 464 old students were selected through a disproportionate stratified random sampling. The questionnaire is divided into two sections. The first section is the personal data of students while the second section addresses students' agents of political education. The study was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics; such as mean, frequency, T-test and chi-square to test relationships, using the SPSS package. Findings revealed that the students are politically influenced in the university system. However, more old than new are influenced. In the same to the male students are more politically socialised than female. It was also found that the main agents of students' political education are the curriculum, the students union and the lecturers.

Keywords: Political education, political socialisation, ideologies, international politics, campaign for democracy, official curriculum, political agents.

INTRODUCTION

Evidences and observations abound in the literature (Akintoye, 1973; Fafunwa, 1974; Fabiyi, <http://nigeriaworld.com/feature/publication...html>) that student's activism predates independence in Nigeria more particularly with the establishment of Yaba Higher College, University College of Ibadan and with the influence of some Nigerian students who had opportunity of studying abroad. It has also been noted that the tempo of activism increased tremendously at the post independence period following the establishment of more universities in the country

(Akintoye, 1973; Fafunwa, 1974).

The nature of student's activism before independence was majorly to fight colonialism particularly, in the early 1920s. In 1925 for instance, the Nigerian students joined their counterparts in West Africa to form the West African students union (WASU) under the leadership of a Nigerian (Oladipo Solanke) which in 1942 demanded the self government of the West African colonies. However, the focus of student activists was redirected to national building in the post-independence period.

Because the university system began during the colonial era and the period of the nationalists anti-colonial struggle, most university students developed the tradition of activism and of a radical progressive political culture

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which has been sustained (Anise, 1979). Unfortunately, there has always been a tendency to refer to these activities as students "unrest". Whatever name is called several factors have been responsible for the so called students' unrest. Internal factors range from dissatisfaction with university policies, rules and regulations, representations on students board and committees of council and senate and even representations on council and senate (Ojo, 1995). Other reasons are lack of communication and consultations between students and authorities in a variety of matters (Ajayi, 1990).

An external/internal factor is students inability to satisfy occupational interest and the deep fear and uncertainty of lack of job opportunities after graduation often cause frustrations and could lead to an "unrest" at the slightest provocation (Olugbade, 1990). External factors leading to students' unrest are mainly concerned with national and international policies. Examples are the Structural Adjustment Programme of the past military regime whereby they partnered with National Labour Council (NLC) to form a strong resistance thereby pressurizing government to a retreat, dialogue or compromise.

Other issues are the controversial 1963 census, the 1965 Western Regional Election, the introduction of the National Youths Service Scheme (NYSS) into Nigerian university system, the abortive coup of February 13, 1976 in which the progressive Head of State General Murtala Mohammed was killed, the annulment of June 12, 1993 presidential election won by M.K.O Abiola which was believed to be the fairest of all elections. This eventually led the then military Head of State General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida to step aside as was the case in Indonesia when university students were instrumental to the complaint that led to the resignation of Soeharto in 1998 after 32 years in power (Hamad et al., 2001).

Additionally, Nigerian students always protest increase in petroleum products which could be compared to Indonesia experience when the students found that the prices of gasoline and transportation fares had been increased they demanded a reduction and government complied. Their actions yielded results as government acted promptly and positively to the demand to lower public bus fares and the state oil company was compelled to lower price of gasoline (Bachtair, 1968; Olugbade, 1990).

The Nigerian students are conversant with international politics. For instance, the Nigerian students in partnership with some organisations supported Nigerian and South African blacks against apartheid regime of South Africa and the killings in Soweto just like some students in the United States used their consuming powers as a political tactic on campus around the country in return to a strategy successfully employed in the civil right movement in the 1960s and in efforts to end apartheid in South Africa in the 1980s (Rucker, 2005; Longo and Meyer, 2006). Also in 1959 the Nigerian students demonstrated against the Anglo-Nigeria Defence Pact, until the pact was abrogated. These examples could be compared with the

American students activities that have successfully pressured other campuses to divest their endowment from companies doing business in Sudan in an attempt to put financial strain on the Sudanese government in response to the genocide in Darfur (Rucker, 2005).

The scenarios described above is an indication that Nigerian university students, like other students in the developed world, have a great potential to be politically engaged and it is obvious that higher education has offered them better opportunities for this political engagement. It is therefore obvious that students get involved in local, national and international politics due to the general awareness created by the college environment.

Another evidence of students' political education which was influenced by the university environment is the persistent increase in Nigeria Students' activism. Students' activism persists because students feel that majority of the citizens or their own parents are being oppressed perhaps because of poverty or lack of access to governance and in most cases those parents who speak out are not heard. Moreover, since the universities are dependent on government for funding and for policy directions, the political class over the years has also seen itself as all powerful and has continued to increase its control on the university system. The response to this automatically rested mainly on Nigerian students who saw this as a form of slavery and erosion of autonomy. The students therefore see themselves as saviours and reformers. The public in turn regards students as leaders of tomorrow and conscience of the nation.

Following the discussion above, the main theses of this study were specifically to:

- Investigate the role of universities in the political education of students.
- Examine the contribution of the universities towards the political education of old and fresh students.
- Identify the agents of political education of students within the universities.
- Ascertain the influence of external agents on the political education of students.
- Determine which of the agents of political education in the universities have the greatest impact on students political education.

Literature review

Political education is defined in agreement with Hamad et al. (2001) as the process in which political attitudes and behaviours are germinated and formed. However, this study does not limit politics to party politics such as voting, and electioneering campaign. For the purpose of this study political education is often used interchangeably with political socialization (Entwistle, 1971). Education has implanted in the student the seeds of knowledge which continues to germinate as they develop from primary school to the University. By the time they are in the

university, the college becomes a predominant model and the central instrument of their political education. University students over the years have been known to have played significant role in transformation or political systems (Coleman 1963; McClintock and Turner, 1963). They both argued that education is a crucial agent of socialization and that the school exerts influence on the individual as well as on the social and political system. If this is true, then one can justify the literature that supports the fact that the school is the major agent of students' political education.

This view is supported by Almond and Verba (1963) in their five nations study where they concluded that among all the variables they considered, education is regarded as the greatest variable of political reform in any country. Undoubtedly, many agents of political education would have influenced university students before and by the time they are in the university. Schooling itself has been known to function as an ideological vehicle for political socialization but the more extensive an individual's education is, the more likely he is to have more political information to possess a wide range of opinions on political matters and to engage in political discussion with a wide range of people and to feel a greater ability to influence political affairs (Almond and Verba, 1963).

It has been argued that individual political behaviour and thoughts are consequences of the environmental influences i.e. those influences directly relating to political influences as well as those forming the general character (Mezey 1975). The university now reports to be the dominant model and central instrument of political education, surpassing even the traditional bond of the family. This is the view of sociologists and political scientists have continually looked for reasons why people participate in politics.

Therefore, one can conclude that university students' socialization involves all kinds of learning which students are exposed to while they are in the university. If one agrees with Milbrath (1971) that the surest single predictor of political involvement is the number of years of formal education, one can safely arrive at the conclusion that the university certainly widens the scope of students' acquaintance and motivates their political knowledge and involvement.

The university system is integrally linked to other parts of the education system namely: primary and secondary. The character of students flows from one level of the system to another. The university system is a key arena for ideological production and for political socialization. The university system is conceptualised as straddling all these domains, constituencies and sets of interests.

Education, because it is capable of developing scarce skills and raising consciousness, holds out particular a promise for the state in relation to its need to control society and the economy. At the same time, education poses a threat to prevailing relations of authority, since education is also capable of stimulating independent

thoughts. By their training, students in higher institutions have access to information and ideas. They can therefore articulate rightly or wrongly, the various state policies and measure rhetoric against reality (Olugbade, 1990).

Once in the university, students' political values change, especially with the length of stay in the university system (Jacobsen, 2001). Jacobsen found that students' political values change in the beginning of their study and after three years of study. Although the change is marginal, it is a hint that students tend to become more politically alike as they live together thus indicating that higher education has a slight homogenising effect on political values.

Literature has supported that the family is the primary agent of socialization. The family has been known to play a role in the formation of attitudes and values of their children. For a child, it is easy for the family to be the agent of political education through indoctrination. The family also provides an environment which is conducive to the acquisition of certain knowledge, values and attitudes which are commonly held by that family (Rush and Althoff, 1971).

Evidences (Almond and Verba, 1963; Hamad et al., 2001) have also supported the fact that in addition to formal education processes, students are very much influenced by on-campus peer and friends group. This is to say that affiliations to public interest and advocacy groups by university students have been found to have a great impact on their political socialization.

Closely connected with the peer group, is political education through campus societies clubs and most importantly, students affiliation with the civil society and advocacy groups outside the campus. For instance, observations have shown that Nigerian students always have strong affiliation with advocacy groups such as the Campaign for Democracy (CD) etc. And they have shared the centre stage of struggles with these advocacy groups and the Nigeria labour congress. This is in line with the findings of Hamad et al. (2004), and Budirdiaradjo (1998) who found that political socialization can step from affiliation with public interest and advocacy groups which have fought for the public interest.

Political agents outside the university often influence political thinking and allegiance of university students. For instance, outside the university campus students often form a large part of the constituency of many political parties. This is because political parties often target the university students' social stratum for political socialization activities. This occurs either directly through involvement with party political institutions or indirectly through social or interest groups established by or connected with a political party (Hamad et al. 2001). In line with this, governments in Nigeria in general, have tended to use students and their unions as progressive support enclaves in pursuit of both legitimacy and popular appeal. Most political parties and their leaders strive to establish student wings to capture the progressive sentiments

Table 1. Biographical information.

		Frequency	Percent
Level/Year	100 level	536	53.6
	200 level	232	23.2
	300 level	103	10.3
	400 level	120	12.0
	500 level	2	.2
	Postgraduate	3	.3
	No Response	4	.4
	Total	1000	100.0
Gender	male	498	49.8
	female	501	50.1
	No Response	1	.1
	Total	1000	100.0
No of Years spent in the University	1	528	52.8
	2	151	15.1
	3	227	22.7
	4	53	5.3
	5	1	0.1
	No response	40	4
Total	999	99.9	
	Total	1000	100.0

Table 2. Relative occurrence of political education in the university.

Level of political education	Frequency	Percent
very low political education	22	2.2
low political education	108	10.8
Moderate political education	446	44.6
High political education	411	41.1
Very High political education	10	1.0
Total	997	99.7
Missing Values	3	.3
Total	1000	100.0

which are usually quite vocal in various matters.

The Nigeria university students also have their own local news carriers in form of what is referred to as 'campus journalism'. University students often place a great reliance on university media as channels of information. The mass media is important because according to Rush and Althoff (1971) not only are more people involved in the communication system but they are reached by the same channels and so the information likely to reach them will be more uniform. For instance, according to Hamad et al. (2001) students and the mass media were instrumental in bringing about political reforms in Indonesia in 1990.

Political education could be shaped by what is transmitted through the official curriculum. This may be true especially in primary and secondary schools where civics is taught as a subject. There is however a dearth of literature to support the fact that the curriculum can be a

Table 3. Status of students political education before and after they entered university.

	Frequency	Percent
Not sure	38	3.8
Strongly agree	84	8.4
Agree	246	24.6
Disagree	333	33.3
Strongly disagree	299	29.9
Total	1000	100.0

source of political education for Nigerian university students. However, observations have shown that political education in the university is largely defined by hidden curriculum, values and attitudes, beliefs that are informally transmitted through the everyday practice of teachers.

Research methodology

The major objective of this study is to determine whether universities play a role in political education of students. The design is survey research using a questionnaire tagged "Political Education of Students in the University" (PESUQ). The study population is OAU. The study sample consists of 1000 students (536 new) and (464 old). This selection was through a disproportionate stratified random sampling. It is disproportionate in the sense that there are more new students than old in the sample. The stratified method adopted was informed by the differences in students' population across the 13 faculties in the university. For this reason, samples were drawn based on the population of students. Questionnaires were administered in a general studies class which comprised all students in each category. Permission was sought from the teachers and students were requested to fill the questionnaire after their lessons.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the number of respondents according to their levels. There are 536 (53.6%) new students at the 100 level while other levels are 436 (43.3%). In the gender category there are 498 male (49.8%) to 501 (50.1%) female respondents.

Table 2 addresses the relative level and depth of political education of students. This table shows that there are more students in the university who believe that the university has educated them politically. Majority of these respondents agreed (strongly agreed and agreed) that the university has influenced them politically. Thus, confirming their sanction of Jacobsen (2001) that political values of students change when they enter the university. Table 3 above shows that the majority disagreed that their political education remained as it was before they

Table 4. Descriptive analysis of students' political education based upon their class/level in the University.

Class/Level in the University	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
100 level	534	66.8951	17.5710	.7604	65.4014	68.3888
200 level	232	72.8534	17.2191	1.1305	70.6261	75.0808
300 level	103	75.6408	15.1275	1.4906	72.6843	78.5973
400 level	119	70.4958	17.8733	1.6384	67.2512	73.7404
500 level	2	76.5000	7.7782	5.5000	6.6159	146.3841
Postgraduate	3	68.0000	7.8102	4.5092	48.5983	87.4017
Missing	7	44.2500	40.9502	20.4751	-20.9109	109.4109
Total	1000	69.5466	17.7043	.5607	68.4464	70.6469

Table 5. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) table for the difference in the Political education of students on the basis of their level in the University.

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	12887.230	6	2147.872		.000
Within Groups	299299.851	990	302.323	7.105	P<0.05
Total	312187.081	996			significant

Table 6. A comparison of contribution of different agents of political education to different levels of students' political education.

Agents	Level of Political Education					Total	% contribution	Missing	
	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High			n	%
Lecturers	0	8	110	231	10	359	40.38	120	13.50
Students' Union	1	9	126	260	10	406	45.67	107	12.04
Other Members of University	0	16	115	246	10	387	43.53	114	12.82
The curriculum	0	23	164	270	10	467	52.53	85	9.56

entered the university. This shows that the university has played a dominant role in students' political education by changing their formal status on political education.

Table 4 analyses the impact of the university in the political education of both old and new students and tries to find out if there are differences. In order to properly address this objective, a null hypothesis was proposed to see if there is a significant difference in the level of political education on the basis of their levels or class in the university. The table shows the differences in mean scores or levels on old and new students between levels 100 and 500. This shows a vagary in students' political education and that their political education probably grows deeper as they spend more years in the university.

Table 5 above goes further to look for differences between groups. The results show that there is a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) in the political education of the university undergraduates, on the basis of their class or level.

In order to determine where in the spectrum of the levels the differences exist, a multiple comparison of their means were undertaken and the result shows that a significant difference occurs between the political education of new students represented by 100 level respondents and old students represented by other levels of respondent. The largest difference in mean was found between 100 level and 300 level respondents (8.7456, $p < 0.05$) with that of those of 100 level respondents by 5.9583 ($p < 0.05$). The second stage in political education of students in the university is the identification of the political agents within the university. This also confirms that the old students are more politically socialized than the new students.

The percentage contributions of the agents of political education in Nigerian universities were presented in Table 6 where the curriculum contributed most highly to students' political education (52.53%) followed by students' union at 45.67% which was closely followed by

Table 7. Ho: There is no significant difference in the political education of male and female respondents.

Gender	N	Mean	Std Deviation	t	p
Male	495	72.1859	18.1869	4.697	0.000
Female	501	66.9701	16.8389		<0.05 significant

other members of the university, (this could be peer groups, religious groups and others) while lecturers contributed the least (40.38%).

Table 7 above is a comparison of male and female students' political education by the university. The result is that a significant difference exists between the political education of male and female respondents at ($t = 4.697$, $p < 0.05$). Obviously both male and female students were socialised in the university but as expected there are more males than females in this category.

DISCUSSION

This study has confirmed that education plays a prominent role in political socialization/education of university students. Confirming Almond and Verba's (1963) position that education determines political attitude and that the more extensive an individual education the more likely he is to be aware of impact of government, to follow politics, to have more political information and to engage in political discussion with a wider range of people. The study also confirms that if a person has received a higher level of education (college degree or higher) then that person will most likely be more aware of political and social issues and will also realise the importance of political participation and feel compelled to become involved (Thomas, 1995). Downloaded at [http://homepage. Mac.com/burkejm/iblog/C37546793/E18_275747931index.html](http://homepage.mac.com/burkejm/iblog/C37546793/E18_275747931index.html) 9/7/2006. This study has confirmed that students' political education changed as soon as they entered university. The study also found that the university is a training ground not only for cross fertilization of ideas but for knowledge development whereby the three domains of education such as cognitive, psychomotor and affective are developed. Certainly, the university autonomy has given students opportunity to develop their potentials and offer them better opportunities for political engagement. The political education of students that are relatively young in the university is different from those older ones. The older one gets in the system, the more political he or she becomes. The new students being fresh in the university need time to settle down and study the university environment. It also often takes time to get them mainstreamed into the university life. This finding therefore confirmed to an extent the study of Jacobsen (2001) when he found that political values of students differ when the students begin to study and that most political values change (only marginally during a three year

period). He however agreed that higher education has a slight homogenizing effect on political values.

It is not surprising that in spite of their education more males than females are politically socialised in the university. This is so because society sees women as disadvantaged, in most cases they are to be seen and not heard. Nigeria is operating a patriarchal system. The inferior position of women in patriarchal society is assumed to be normal and is reinforced by various institutions. At the political level, women are supposed to be silent in community meetings and in decision making. Men meet and take decisions which are binding on all. It is not surprising therefore if girls submit politically to men. The study therefore confirms that women themselves have internalised this culture of inferiority in politics and have accepted the idea that they are of lower status than men.

On agents of political education, a major finding in this study is the influence of curriculum on the political education of students. The school curriculum is important in shaping the students' understanding of the political world. In a country with a strong ideology, textbooks are used to indoctrinate students; they are often selective and contain biases. However, in the universities, especially in a democracy like Nigeria, it is difficult to control what, and how teachers interpret the textbooks. Truly, campus socialization provides political knowledge to students but it has also been found that in addition to formal educational processes, students are also often very much influenced by on-campus peer and friendship groups. It is hereby confirmed that political education could be shaped by what is transmitted through the official curriculum. The curriculum dictates the knowledge system of each student. It can also widen the cognitive experience of students. Closely connected with the curriculum is the role of lecturers as to their of the curriculum. In other words, political education can be largely defined by hidden curriculum, values, attitudes, and beliefs that are informally transmitted through the everyday practice of the university lecturers.

Obviously, there seems to be evidence that even classroom teachers often corrupt curriculum by hijacking it to promote their ideologies. Nigerian university teachers are noted to be highly political and have been known to constantly interact with students even during lectures. It is possible that no major course or courses in the university can escape the plight of political interference.

Another identified agent of political education of university students is the Students Union. The students

union is saddled with the responsibility of managing the affairs of students. Unions exist to represent the interests of students. Students unionism arose out of the recognition that students should be given some protection and prevented from being exploited unduly either by government or by the university. It also sets out to improve the ability of its members to influence decisions, share in decision making and exchange views and ideas with the management.

A student union government is like a typical government as it has the Senate and also observes legislative procedures. The student union is always the first platform where students practice political roles. The Nigerian students' unions are highly politicised bodies and often serve as a training ground for indoctrination, activism and for aspiring politicians. In the Nigerian university the union is headed by the Union executive. It is this executive that dictates the pace of policy and political beliefs of students. The executive could therefore be described as an elitist group that controls all the activities of the university students. It is therefore not surprising that they are the second prominent agents of political education of students. The unions organize several activities for the enlightenment of students. In Nigeria they are very active politically powerful and they comment on all aspects of governance in the university, in the nation and in the international scene. The students' unions facilitate students activities.

The next groups to students union are 'other groups within the university. The study has a limitation here as it did not identify these other groups. It is however safe to say that these groups could be different peer groups, religious associations, faculty associations. This supports the fact that the peer group has been identified as one of several factors that influences attitude formation, and relations with friends of the same age also plays a role in forming one's identity (Ivor Morrish in St. Vem-brianto, 1990).

Surprisingly, the university lecturers tag behind others and are regarded as number four political socialiser of university students. The university lecturers are known for their political activism as strong supporters for students' course. Many times, the students in league with the university lecturers have joined the civil society in voicing out their opinions and resisting government policies. Majority of citizens believed that students acquired their activism through tutelage of their lecturers. Some of the university lecturers are themselves activists and their union called Academic Staff of University Unions (ASUU) have often been regarded as leftist and always in partnership with the students union. It is surprising therefore that their political influence on students is marginal.

Summary and Conclusion

This study has shown that the university is arena of political education of the students. It has also confirmed that

the higher the education, qualification the more intense the political socialization. That is why old students are more politically socialised by the university. It also confirms that the process of political education can change, be re-arranged or even be redistributed in line with one's education. Although the early year of students' political education is crucial, one finds that as soon as they enter the university their earlier political influences do change. Male students more than females, feel more compelled to be politically socialised in the university but evidences still support that female students are not totally excluded from the process of socialization.

In line with the Oklahoma Students' Civic Engagement Declaration of 2003, this study calls for a profound civic commitment and a call for institutions of higher education to do a better job educating students for democracy. Thus, there is call for students in the university to be educated in the area of politics and policy. Perhaps, courses like civics could be introduced with the general studies being taught in the university. This will help students to have a direct knowledge of politics rather than pick from the hidden curriculum and the dictates of the small group of people who constitute the executives of the students union.

In conclusion, there is a strong indication that university environment provides a separate and different learning environment from earlier education and that different agents exert influence on students significantly. This study therefore posits that civic education should be intensified in Nigerian universities. This argument is also supported by CIRCLE working paper 46 of May 2006.

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