

# **Introduction of Political Education for the Propagation of Democracy in Africa: The Perspective of African Academics, Part II**

by

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## **Abstract**

In the first part of this series which appeared in *The Journal of Pan African Studies* (volume 16, number 6, December 2013, pp. 201-218) the discussion centred on the fact that political education is very crucial, and if democracy is to mature in Africa and contribute towards achieving democracy and credible free and fair electoral process, it would change African politics dramatically. To achieve this important aim, the author believes that all categories of teachers at all levels of African institutions should be provided with both fundamental and advanced political education during their studies in higher institutions of learning to be able to propagate the niceties of political education to our youth to advance and make democracy successfully implemented in African countries. The argument for part two is that there must be a way to grow political democracy in African societies and how this can be done to advance and usher a new political dispensation so that democracy can successfully thrive in Africa. If this can be achieved, the possibility is that it will end the numerous civil strives and advance economic and social development for the benefit of Mother Africa and its people.

## Introduction

Jacquelyn Jackson, an American politician on 29 September 2010 made it clear during a gathering that "... education must remain the basis of Democracy and not a political football" (<http://jaibihar.com/voter-awareness-will-push-politicians-to-act-experts-say/6106/>).

Unfortunately, most countries around the world make education a political football instead of the basis of Democracy. In *Arizona Illustrated* Al Melvin, another American stated "I am not here to advocate for one or the other; I am here to advocate for extracting education from the maw of electoral politics. When did the education of our children – and both sides must admit that today's children are tomorrow's workforce, voters, citizenry – become the fodder for political posturing and blah, blah, blahing, and when will we pull our heads out of the sand and begin to truly invest in the future of this state?" ([http://www.votesmart.org/npat\\_about.php](http://www.votesmart.org/npat_about.php)). As Derek Bok quoted by Harber, (1987) explains that education "...is a whole lot cheaper than ignorance. This is our real choice. Invest in education today or larger prisons tomorrow". It is a truism that universal education has forever been the basis for the freedoms countries are built upon. The American president Thomas Jefferson put it clearly in the following excerpt: "I think by far the most important bill in our whole code, is that for the diffusion of knowledge among the people. No other sure foundation can be devised for the preservation of freedom and happiness... The tax which will be paid for this purpose is not more than the thousandth part of what will be paid to kings, priests and nobles who will rise up among us if we leave the people in ignorance." (Thomas Jefferson to George Wythe, 1786, ME 5:396).

## Western World Political Democracy: Successfully Thrived

Who can argue with the ideal espoused above? President Jefferson focuses on two essential points for education today that is for education in the future and for education always to be Harber, C. (1987). essential for the "diffusion of knowledge" among every African; although it will cost money to support. Therefore, it is necessary that there is a diffusion of knowledge in political education to make sure public schools are adequately funded, well stocked with professionally trained and qualified teachers as well as with relevant and applicable resources. Moreover, in terms of infrastructure, another way is to make democratic political education progressive and productive in an African democratic political environment.

U.S. President Nixon in 1960 made this point and illustrated it with the following statement, "The target of American education must be that every individual has the opportunity and the facilities to develop to the highest power the full range of his inherent ability. There must be no arbitrary barriers – neither racial nor economics. On such a scale, the excellent lathe operator and the excellent biochemist are not only equal as Americans but also equally valuable members of our Nation's pool of skilled work force. And this, in a free society, is as it should be. There must be no arbitrary barriers – neither racial nor economics" (Harber., 1987).

What is going on in Africa in terms of democratic political education provision is the negative politicization of education, especially in Africa if it comes to the ideological bases and conditions of service for teachers. This is clearly expressed by a commentator (No author) in the South African newspaper (*Sowetan* 10<sup>th</sup> April 1994) during the South African democratic political dawn in 1994 in this excerpt: “Here is what I do not understand. Why a vote for education is not considered a vote for business?” He is of the view that every cent invested in education today is an investment in our workforce of tomorrow and for this reason every cent must be considered in terms of effective and efficient education provision. According to this commentator if we bleed education provision today, we are going to have workers who cannot read, without critical thinking skills, without the knowledge that is critical to every business person who is trying to make their business a success. His feeling was that at times we seem to be in the middle of a huge battle ground where educators lined up with their guns on one end of the field, and business leaders lined up on the end – guns at ready, pointed at each other. Evidently, during this battle the ones caught in the middle of those bullets are thousands of kids, whose futures are caught in the line of site of all those guns.

These kids in our schools, eyes bright, eager to learn, wanting desperately to open their minds to all that is possible, to learn how to think, ponder, create and dream. They need us to secure their futures. We must always remember that it is our kids who are the biggest victims of the constant and loud, battle of words and ideologies; especially in terms of curricular changes. It is our choice – educate them today, in classrooms that are well-stocked, taught by teachers who are well trained and paid with living incentives to retain them in the classroom. It must be understood that if we keep draining our schools dry, forcing our teachers to face overflowing classrooms and draining their own creativity by having to figure out how to drain every last shred of lead out of a number of pencils, we are headed for disaster.

The vote of the author here is for the words of Richard Nixon in other words it is necessary to provide every individual with the opportunity and the facilities to learn in institutions of learning to become all that they can. In earnest, we have only one future before us – be we teachers, kids, businesses or public servants, and thus, it is in our hands to make that future bright today for our children, because they are going to become the future leaders.

Democratic politics is a feature of all societies and prevalent. What is identifiable from the perspective of democratic politics is because people are not always in agreement with each other in terms of how societies should be governed. Despite this, in all societies, conflicts and disagreements in societies mean that choices and decisions have to be made about democratic political activities. Decision making involves the exercise of power and authority by those who have been elected to actually make decisions as well as those who try to influence them. The view of the authors is that democratic political decision making should not be the responsibility of those politicians in power but must be part of the Constitutional provisions of all African countries. In this way, democratic political decisions will respond to the needs of the people and not a few political cliques.

From ancient to modern times education has been an instrument for the development and advancement of people and societies; and also it can be used as a means of social control (Harper, 1978). Education plays a substantial role and influences individuals in many ways, even in their political behaviour. Hence, we know that people who have a formal education tend to have higher levels of participation and are largely engaged in and committed those who have little or no education. The education of society is indeed something that all governments need. In politics, the argument is that the exposure to formal political education directs the working class to vote more during national elections is plausible and certainly understandable.

Theoretically, Marx's dependency theory contends that the underdeveloped societies are oppressed by the political power holders of those societies who control key economic resources. Marx is also of the view that the only ways to break this strangle hold of political power holders is to get politically educated and to become aware of oppressed conditions. Likewise in education, Paulo Freire has placed emphasis on the conscientisation of the present position so that people are able to comprehend their positions, do something about it, and thus, overthrow the oppressor (Pereira, 2007). Once people have received education pertaining to their conditions, they are expected to bring about positive and meaningful changes in society that can benefit the immediate and distant (Boaduo, 2004). In reality, education prepares individuals to play effective and efficient roles in their society by eradicating ignorance of all forms. Introspectively, education acts as a weapon that can be used to change individuals in society for the betterment of life and living. Thus, political education should bring about effective and efficient change in the lives of people in society so they can become empowered and transformed into social assets of their society.

Therefore, political awareness education for all citizens of a nation will enable people to understand and participate in general elections, and thus they become aware that their vote is a weapon they can use against non-performing politicians and political parties. Voters' votes are theoretically the only means through which the people can bring about a change in the political system of a country. In earnest, a voters' vote is a weapon that can make politicians hear their screams and constraints wherein the essence of active participation of citizens and civil society can be a pure and true democratic practice in a form of empowerment of the people in the electoral and political processes.

Traditionally, most citizens of society have been ruled by kings and chiefs that have held most if not all the executive, legislative and judicial powers in their communities. Nevertheless, the transformations from chieftainship or kingship politics to the politics of the modern day has shifted power to the ordinary citizens so he or she can now become engaged in and play in the political game. Presently, politics is the subject of the day in almost all societies and in turn, political education is required to provide citizens a way to critically evaluate and assess the basic explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in their nation's political production.

In the final analysis, political education is required to orientate citizens – particularly teachers – and to encourage them to serve as instruments to be used to change societies (Doyle 1993, Osler 2000). Hence, we argue that political education justifies the following ambitions:

- Cognitive orientation to enable citizens to acquire concepts of political knowledge and modes of thinking relevant to the comprehension of a political phenomenon
- The provision of evaluative orientation via the clarification and mediation of values and the development of a capacity for political value judgment
- Action orientation which places education in a position to conduct political engagement designed to equip and empower the people.

### **Compulsory Political Education for African Youth**

The compulsory provision of political education is a necessity for African youth, and thus, an aspect of liberation. Literature on this liberation perspective abound. For example, African politicians like Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere and Robert Mugabe saw education as a means to liberate people from their misery. Political education, therefore, becomes essential for the modernization of new values which can be developed, if majority of citizens are equipped with it. Political education also enables citizens to become patriotic and responsible members of society, and autonomous learners in institutions of higher learning. The great deal about democracy and the supposed contribution of the learning methods to its emergence and extension in the institutions of higher learning and societies should be its overall magnitude within society, which can generate more energy than before. Therefore, the more the people are politically educated, the more a democratic impetus will escalate and contribute towards the production of autonomous and rational thinking members of society. Hence, in this context, the belief is that political awareness education and the active participation of teachers, students and civil society in mainstream politics – national, provincial, local – would be fruitful to the growth and development of a nation.

### **What Political Education Can Do**

The provision of political education can thus enable lecturers, teachers, students and the entire citizens to think and reason for themselves, and to assess and analyze the political situation in their societies. This would lead them towards good decision making as to whether to follow a particular political ideology and its doctrines or vie for alternatives. Meanwhile, this is a tool for empowerment and can contribute to a substantial mobilization of the society towards good governance, and consequently, it would be authentic and genuine for teachers, students and the entire citizens of societies to make appropriate choices during national elections and referendums.

Generally, well-informed citizens who are politically educated and orientated become politically conscious and will be able to make the fairest decision with valid reasons why they opt for what they choose, and secondly, they are self-determined, as opposed to adult-guided political students, they have a capacity and potential to challenge the concrete authority of the political institution and its functional rules in a more abstract and professional manner than those indoctrinated and programmed and are told how things operate without questioning procedures. In this matrix, the imperative is on teachers and students at institutions of higher learning because they are the primary stakeholders and beneficiaries of political niceties. However, ideally, the entire civil society should be the epicenters of the country's political actions so people can substantially take part in the initiative towards changes and decision making as a focal point for the advancement their country's economic and social development.

Political activists concur that political education inculcates a commitment to social justice, especially by those who are less privileged, hence political education equips people with the required political knowledge and skills for their individual progress and development. Thus, political education should be a comprehensive social tool for any struggle for liberation. In addition, history has shown that teachers and students who are politically educated are liberated in their educational institutions and become conscious, self-directed, organized and collectively united in activities and actions centered on deep comprehension and consultative insight consistent with the wishes and measures of the masses in their society and institutions. Most importantly, it is also substantial for political education to equip students and teachers to be aware that being liberated does not mean that one should trample into other peoples' interests and ambitions. Thus, the main key in the provision of political education is to develop political consciousness among all stakeholders, and as result, enabling them to understand and facilitate the implementation of a country's developmental policies.

## **Conclusion**

It is essential that democratic political education become compulsory in all institutions of higher learning in Africa, thus lecturers and teachers can call for and institute the propagation of the democratic political ideals. Reasons for this proposition abound, and the provision of democratic political education will enable members of societies to explore attributes and factors that contribute to peace, stability and justice locally, nationally and internationally. It will also open the learning horizons of citizens on issues related to humanity worldwide; citizens will in turn be exposed to the indicative approaches set by the United Nations in its Universal Declaration of Human Rights for institutional and national evaluation and assessment within the human rights framework for nations around the world. Through this form of education, citizens will start to realize that the world is really a global village where diverse institutions, traditions and cultures converge and co-exist amicably. In short, democratic political education will further empower citizens to comprehend the fact that any potential threat could be ameliorated through political negotiation. Therefore, both the educational institutions and communities can organize macrocosms reflecting the global diversity of humankind.

And via the African particularities, African youth must be assisted in their efforts to participate in politics in a democratic context so they can be productive in political discussions, issues, and thus engage in lifelong learning to enhance their political involvement. Therefore, it is important that institutions of higher learning should holistically prepare and empower young citizens to live and harmoniously function in a heterogeneous world, even though they might be homogenous in their particular structures, yet, they can grow and develop social and political values which can enable them to become citizens of the global village and as a result contribute to peace building, sustainability and progressive determination under the umbrella of political democracy and a respect for humanity worldwide.

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