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Role of civics and ethical education for the development of democratic governance in Ethiopia: Achievements and challenges

Endalcachew Bayeh

Department of Civics and Ethical Studies, College of Social Sciences and Humanities, P.O. Box 19, Ambo, Ethiopia

A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

The purpose of this study is to examine the role of civics and ethical education in building the good behaviour of citizens and making them active participants in the development of democratic governance in Ethiopia. To achieve this purpose, the researcher employed qualitative methodology. Accordingly, secondary sources, such as books, journal articles, government documents, reports and Internet sources, were used. To substantiate the data gathered through secondary sources, the researcher also used primary sources where data were collected mainly via key informant interviews. Based on the data analysed, findings of the study indicate that the present civic and ethical education is progressive compared to its predecessors. It has helped to introduce youth to the values of democracy and human rights, which had never existed in the country's modern history. This education's role in building the good behaviour of citizens is an undeniable fact. It has brought awareness to the society of what actions and behaviours are expected from a good citizen. It has also had a certain practical effect on the ground. However, the changes brought by delivering the course are not satisfactory in the sense of not having effectively achieved the expected level of outcome. The findings of the research outlined the following as major reasons for said limitations: content- and context-related problems, lack of civil societies' engagement, lack of democratic school administration, improper method of delivery, pressure from external environment, weak democracy, limited geographical reach of the course, and lack of role model teachers. Thus, the research concludes that due to several factors, delivering civics and ethical education does not adequately meet its objectives. Thus, for the practical realization of words on the course, the study calls for the strong commitment of all stakeholders and for them to be role models to others and create an environment conducive to practically building the behaviour and skills needed in the subject. Therefore, the study calls for the strong and integrated commitment of the government in the aforementioned areas of drawbacks.

1. Introduction

It is obvious that democracy cannot be achieved in the absence of citizen participation. Democracies in Europe faced the problem in sustaining themselves. As a remedy, all the democracies have been convinced of the importance of having active and informed citizens who will sustain democracy (Deth, 2013). Creating active citizenship is instrumental to the flourishing of democracy. Active citizenship in this sense is the ability of the people "to exercise and defend their democratic rights and responsibilities in the society, to value diversity and to play an active part in democratic life" (Deth, 2013). For citizens to be active and thereby undertake these activities, they need to have the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values (Deth, 2013). To this end, citizenship education has been provided in many countries of the world. Through Civic Education, peoples' participation will bring and sustain democracy. After all, "democracy does not deserve its name without citizens' participation" (Deth, 2013).

The current government of Ethiopia has introduced and is working towards effective realization of Civic Education to inculcate democratic culture in its citizens (FDRE, 2004). The subject has been offered in Ethiopia at different levels in the schools with the intention of creating good citizens equipped with virtuous

characters who are active participants in the overall affairs of their country. However, there has been no comprehensive study conducted on the role of Civic and Ethical Education in achieving such objectives. The studies conducted are insufficient in addressing the roles and constraints of the subject. Thus, to supplement these limited studies, the researcher has undertaken this study whose objective is to examine the achievements and challenges of Civic and Ethical Education in bringing the development of democratic governance to Ethiopia. To achieve this objective and because of the nature of this study, the researcher employed a qualitative methodology. In addition, secondary sources such as books, journal articles, government documents, reports and Internet sources were utilized. To substantiate the data gathered from secondary sources, the researcher also used primary sources where data were collected mainly via key informant interviews.

2. Definitions of civic and ethical education

Etymologically, the word *civics* is derived from the Latin word *civitas*, which means 'citizen', or 'of citizen'. This, in turn, takes *civics* to mean the discipline of knowledge dealing with the day-to-day affairs of the state and its citizens (Meron, 2006). In its later use, the expression Civic and Ethical Education has taken on different nomenclatures in different countries (such as Civic Education, citizenship education, civic engagement, education for democratic citizenship, civic culture, political education, and moral education) (Vasiljevi, 2009) with no significant difference in their essence and purpose, as can be inferred from the definitions and purposes stated later herein. Like other social science concepts, Civic and Ethical Education is subject to different definitions by different scholars, but with considerable commonalities.

According to UNDP (2004):

*"**Civic Education** is learning for effective participation in democratic and development processes at both local and national levels. It is an important means for capacity development on the societal level by empowering people for effective civic engagement. It is an essential dimension in strengthening a society's ability to manage its own affairs and is complementary to capacity development on the individual and institutional levels."*

It is also stated that *"**Civic education** is the process of creating awareness and provision of information and learning experiences to equip and empower citizens to participate positively in the democratic processes of their community, country and the outside world"* (UPIMAC, 2014). This shows the tremendous role Civic Education can play in the democratization process of a given country by actively involving citizens in the political affairs at different levels of their country, even beyond.

*"**Citizenship education** is also defined to deal with the relationship between the individual and political society, between the self and others"* (Ross, 2012). In this study, we see one's membership to and role in the society at large. It provides learners with a clear picture of the political environment they are placed in.

Moreover, Meron (2006) notes that *"Within any given political or moral tradition, **civics** refers to education in the obligations and rights of citizens enshrined under that tradition"*. It provides awareness of the rights of citizens to participate in the political, social, economic and cultural aspects of their country, and of the corresponding obligations they should discharge. Likewise, Palati (2014) writes that *"in the context of social relationship there are many duties to be performed and correspondingly many rights to be respected. It is with them that civics is concerned"*. Thus, Civic Education is a subject which basically addresses the rights and duties of citizens.

3. Historical development of civic and ethical education

The origin and development of Civic and Ethical Education date back to the ancient Greek city-state, Athens, with the aim of creating active and participating citizens for the then Athenian direct democracy (Meron, 2006; Birhanu, 2012). Civic Education has a parallel development with democracy. Hence, it is fair to say that Athens served as the foundation for modern Civic and Ethical Education. Subsequently, the outbreak of revolutions in Britain (1688), America (1776) and France (1789) contributed a great deal to the development of Civic Education (Meron, 2006; Birhanu, 2012), in that those revolutions brought forth new democratic concepts and principles which, in turn, paved the way for the advancement of Civic Education in Europe and the world.

However, Civic Education became very popular in the 1990s as an instrument for promoting democracy (Browne, 2013). A number of factors necessitated the delivery of civic Education, such as the emergence of democratic states and multi-cultural societies, global injustice and inequality, concern about civic and political engagement, and the anti-democratic and racist movements (Birhanu, 2012). Similarly, major factors that initiate interest in the teaching of ethical education include the following: rapid changes in scientific output, increased cross-cultural contacts, and a weakening of national boundaries due to expansion of Internet, satellite TV and other media (Birhanu, 2012).

Modern Civic Education was first practiced in the educational system of the United States at the beginning of the 20th century (Vasiljevi, 2009). Later, it expanded throughout the world, including Ethiopia.

4. Historical development of civic and ethical education in Ethiopia

The name, contents and methods of Civic Education have been changing from regime to regime, being influenced by the deep-rooted religious and cultural values of the country and by the nature and orientation of the political philosophy of a particular political system (Meron, 2006). Notwithstanding such changes, the concept of Civic and Ethical Education, in Ethiopia, is not a 1990s phenomenon. As Tesfaye et al. (2013) noted, its historical existence can be traced back to the beginning of indigenous education that parallels the introduction of Christianity in the 4th century B.C. From that time on, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was devoted to offering moral education primarily intended to create the unconditional acceptance of, and loyalty to, the ruling class. It continued to be used in modern education until the end of the Imperial regime in 1974 (Tesfaye et al. 2013). Hence, a subject known as *moral education* was taught formally in Ethiopian schools during the Haile Selassie regime (Birhanu, 2012; Meron, 2006; Tekeste, 2006; Tesfaye et al., 2013). However, the very purpose of the subject was to shape the character of students in line with the Orthodox Christian faith to inculcate a sense of obedience in the younger generation so that they would remain submissive to the prevailing political, social and economic order (Birhanu, 2012; Meron, 2006; Tekeste, 2006; Tesfaye et al., 2013). In the 1970s, Civic Education had been offered as a component of the history course in grade eight under a chapter entitled 'civics', but with the same purpose (Meron, 2006). Generally, the Emperor used the subject as a means of sustaining power, which was later suspended with the collapse of the regime.

Following the collapse of the Imperial regime in 1974, the country succumbed to a military rule with a completely different ideology (Tekeste, 2006; Tesfaye et al., 2013). The military regime was allied to socialist ideology, so that the education of that era was a means of inculcating that ideology into society and thus enable