Assessing democratic classroom practices among secondary school civic education teachers in the global south: case study of South East Nigeria

Cresantus N. Biamba¹,², Obioha N. Chidimma², Ogunji V. Chinwe², Mezieobi C. Kelechi² and Nwajiuba A. Chinyere²

Abstract: Democratic classroom practices are all strategies adopted by classroom teachers to actively engage students in the learning processes. Considerable literature assessing influence of Civic Education on youths’ active participation in a democratic society exists. Not much have reported an empirically conducted study on classroom best practices adopted by Civic Education teachers in the Global South. This paper examines classroom democratization by Civic Education teachers in South East Nigeria, students’ and teachers’ perceptions of democratic classroom, and challenges confronting classroom democratization. Focus Group Discussion and Democratic classroom questionnaire were used to elicit information from 151 civic education teachers and 1400 senior secondary school one (SS1) students. Findings revealed that Civic Education teachers in South East Nigeria adopted democratic classroom practices marginally. Recommendation includes more adoption of democratic classroom best practices for development of students’ critical thinking abilities, preparing them to become participatory in their civic duties and reducing crimes among today’s youths.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Cresantus Biamba is Associate Professor in Education at the Department of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Education and Business Studies, University of Gavle and has extensive research expertise and a continuing active interest in the areas of school leadership, organizational change and culture, school effectiveness and improvement, staff development, civic education and democracy, education for sustainable development and higher education policy and Internationalization. He holds a Ph.D. in International and Comparative Education, from the Institute of International Education, Stockholm University, Sweden. Chidimma Nwadiuto Obioha is Assistant Lecturer of Sociology of Education Foundation, Alex-Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike (AEFUNAI). Having graduated with a master’s degree in Education Sociology (M.Ed), she has keen interest in the research areas of Democracy in Education, capacity building needs in students and influence on career aspirations.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT
Civic Education is a core subject offered to senior secondary school students in Nigeria. Research reveals that the subject can translate into transformed behavior and active engagement of citizens in civic responsibilities. Against this backdrop of great benefits from learning civic education, this study sought to investigate the democratic classroom practices employed by secondary school civic education teachers in the South Eastern Nigeria educational context. Students and teachers’ perspectives of classroom democratization and the challenges facing application of democratic practices were identified in the study. Two sets of questionnaire and focus group discussions (FGD) were used for data collection. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequency and percentages. The significance was tested using an independent sample t-test. Three core concepts were identified from the thematic analysis. Result revealed lack of freedom in the classroom which may have contributed to the marginal level of democratic practices in classrooms.
Subjects: Secondary Education; Teachers & Teacher Education; Classroom Practice; Education Policy & Politics

Keywords: Democracy; civic education; classroom practices and teachers

1. Introduction
One of the active concepts and approaches in education which has been stressed over the years by research is democratic classroom environment (Ahmad et al., 2015). The concept of democratic classroom environment is attributed to the educational reformer “John Dewey” and his philosophical thoughts which staunchly support freedom and democracy in education (Louis, 2003). Dewey asserted that the basic aim of education is to produce, active, participative and contributory citizen leaders for the society hence his advocacy for democracy in education if this goal must be actualized.

Democratic classroom is a safe and cooperative classroom environment where students find better opportunity to make choices, to speak and feel encouraged to participate in the discussions and to make contributions (Pane, 2010). This type of classroom is fundamentally called an engaged classroom. SunyCortland (2015) has equally outlined various definitions of democratic classroom practices. Two out of them which formed the foundations of this study defined democratic classroom practices: firstly, “as one involving students on a regularly and in developmentally appropriate ways in shared decision-making increasing their obligation for helping to make the classroom a good place to be and learn”; secondly “as one which provides an ongoing forum where students’ thoughts are valued and where any need of the group can be addressed”. From the foregoing, democratic classroom can be operationally defined as one which actively engages the students so as to produce well-equipped and character transformed citizens of a country.

Emphasis on the institutionalization of democratic classrooms around the globe is fast-gaining momentum. Thus, the implicit and explicit need to stress democratic values and engagement in education in order to sustain democracy becomes imperative. Over the years, the democratic classrooms have been used for various purposes such as civic education, character education, group learning and moral development and so on (Tonga, 2014). Young people learn the way to contribute to their society through formal and informal learning experiences in schools (F Reichert & Print, 2018). Supposedly, teachers are the ultimate instruments of such learning and change. What a teacher believes about self, context, content, specific teaching practices, teaching approach, and students plays a role in teaching. Unfortunately, scholars who have studied through varied theoretical lens (Apple & Beaner, 2007; Nichols & Beliner, 2007) asserted that public schools today are more concerned about the production of proficient test scores on state mandated standardized tests than putting democracy into practice. Consensus opinion among them is that high-stakes reforms of public schools have driven them far away from democratic practices. Yet, retired U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor clearly noted citizenship as a habit that must be learnt, and declared that public schools were established to educate students for democratic involvement (Barnes, 2011).

Active, effective and knowledgeable citizens who are eager to take charge for themselves as well as their societies and partake in political processes so as to develop the societies are highly needed for growth (Ünal & Kaygin, 2020). Citizenship education seeks to educate citizens who will be free to make their own judgments and hold their own convictions (UNESCO, 2010). Such individuals are produced for their society by industries, such as the educational institutions (Ahmad et al., 2015; Buchholz, 2013). Citizenship education should be transformative (Banks, 2017) and transformative civic education will develop citizens who critically reflect on societal issues. In light of the above-stated (UNESCO, 2010) objectives of teaching Citizenship education among which includes; learning to exercise one’s judgment and critical faculty and acquiring a sense of individual and community responsibilities.

Democracy has been identified as one idea inherent in civic education. This is because it concerns politics and institutions (UNESCO, 2010). Democracy hinges on faith in the pride and worth of every
individual as a human being. Thus, contemporary teaching and learning of Civic Education should revolve around giving students the opportunity to learn at their own pace. Students should actively participate through dialogues, collaborations, contributions, engaging in discussions with teachers and their fellow students. Classroom discussion is intended to arouse students to develop their own personal viewpoints on issues at hand. Thus, Schuitema et al. (2018) posited that opportunities should be created for all students to express their points of view, though such classroom interactions should be steered by the teacher to ensure a convinced quality of discussion.

It is imperative that Civic Education teachers should possess democratic values such as freedom, equality and justice, autonomy, cooperation, shared decision-making, and a sense of community (Kincal & Isik, 2003). The crux of these values is mostly to guide teaching and learning in order to form a varied and unbiased learning community in the classroom (Trafford, 2008); this is in essence democratic classroom practices. The teacher’s part must be less dictative so as to make room for the students’ perceptions (Schuitema, Radstake, Van de Pol & Veugeliers, 2018). Giving students freedom and choice will benefit the society by developing people who are open to change and to listening to others so that everyone will consider him/herself vital to society (Morrison, 2008). Students in such a democratic class become concerned for one another and they may be helped to build bridges among themselves (Parker, 2010). Every person must be esteemed, listened to and be actively involved in the learning and decision-making processes in education. Quality civic education “not only increases citizenship knowledge and engagement, but also expands civic equality, improves twenty-first century skills, and may reduce the dropout rate and improve school climate (Guilfoile & Delander, 2014:3) as real-world civic learning chances advance students’ chances of staying in school.

Democratic classroom practices have been consistently ignored in schools, thus using a structural equation model, Knowles (2017) concluded that teacher- and text-centered modes of instruction (e.g., lectures, completing worksheets) are more frequently used by the old-fashioned teachers. Corroborating this, Magasu et al. (2020) have reported that secondary school teachers are still teaching Civic Education using teacher-centered (traditional model) strategies despite policy direction and current changes in curriculum and technology (Martens & Jason, 2013). According to Guilfoile and Delander (2014:4), the most commonly used traditional method of instruction by these educators is lecture method where students spent more of their time listening to their instructors’ reiterations from a text, learn by heart important dates and facts … The authors reiterated that traditional teaching styles which have constantly been preferred by Civic teachers contribute a little to stimulate creativity in students’ minds. This is due to the usual perception of teachers as authorities on the subject matter at hand (Hand & Levinson, 2012) and intention to control the content of classroom interaction (Molinari et al., 2013). In such a learning environment invariably, students cannot freely express their minds and thoughts or engage in critical thinking in the absence of interactions with fellow students.

Empirical research regarding democratic practices in the Civic Education classroom in Nigeria is still in its infancy. However, an extent of literature has shown that civic education teachers in the Eastern countries of the world apply different types of teaching methods in the classroom. A student data finding revealed that classroom climates are open for discussion (Knowles et al., 2018). The classroom in addition allows respectful questioning of ideas which are effective in promoting positive civic development. It was also reported that Nordic teachers were likely to negotiate with students about what was to be learned, while teachers from the Czech Republic were more restrictive (V. B. Reichert & Torney-Purta, 2019). Martens and Jason (2013) reported that four broad teaching approaches were employed by social studies teachers in America. They are traditional teaching (use of methods including textbook reading, worksheets, memorization), video teaching, active learning, and maintenance of an open classroom climate. The researchers’ analysis indicated that methods fostering an open classroom climate (i.e., encouraging students’ input) in combination with traditional teaching, video teaching, active learning seems to be the most fruitful across the board. Furthermore, they posited that any combination
including an open classroom climate maximizes benefit while traditional combined with an open classroom climate seems to do the best.

In the debate on the purpose of education, some research has focused on the “decline of civic education and the willingness of young people to assume active citizenship roles” (Cooperation for National and Community Service [NCNC 2005:1])

A country that has her larger number of youths as school dropouts is bound to experience increase in social vices such as kidnapping, cultism, obtaining by tricks (419), armed robbery, raping, etc. According to the latest report on schooling status of Nigerian youths aged 5–24 years, the percentage of youth who are no more schooling increases steady up to the age of 24 years (National Population Commission (Nigeria) & RTI International, 2016:11). This trend reflects the lower participation rates in senior secondary and tertiary education. Some products of today’s secondary education system are passive citizens who lack critical thinking, questioning, decision-making and problem-solving skills required for survival in this twenty-first century. They are products who are unable to respect the views and feelings of others, citizens who are democratically ineffective and less engaged in Civic activities, deep into destructive behaviors leading to dropping out of school. No value is attached to the dignity of labor except for things that will give them quick money. The fear here is that illiterate population of youths may likely become a fruitful ground for tribalism, fanaticism, terrorism and criminal acts perpetrated by public secondary schools. There is, therefore, a need to examine the democratic classroom practices employed by senior secondary civic education teachers in South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Exploring the democratic classroom practices adopted by Civic Education teachers strengthens the need and importance of incorporating the most appropriate teaching methods so as to produce citizens who shall be equipped with problem-solving skills necessary for success in this twenty-first century. It is in light of this, that this study is set to assess the democratic classroom practices among senior secondary Civic Education teachers in South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria

1.1. Purpose of the study
The main purpose of this study was to assess the democratic classroom practices among senior secondary Civic Education teachers in South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The study will specifically

(1) Assess the level to which Civic Education teachers in South-East geo-political zone of Nigeria apply democratic practices (collaboration, freedom, critical thinking, and decision-making)

(2) Assess students’ perception of a democratic classroom.

(3) Examine teacher’s perception of a democratic classroom practice.

(4) Identify what constraints are confronting civic education teachers in practicing democracy in the classroom based on Teachers Perspective.

1.2. Research questions
The following research questions were posed to guide the study:

1. To what level do Civic Education teachers in southeast geo-political zone of Nigeria apply democratic practices (collaboration, freedom, critical thinking, and decision-making)

2. What is the students' perception about democratic practices that should be employed in Civic Education classrooms in South East Nigeria?

3. What is teachers’ perception of a democratic classroom practice?

4. What are the constraints of civic education teachers in practicing democracy in the classroom based on Teachers Perspective?
1.3. Hypothesis
A null hypothesis was formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance;

H01: There is no significant difference in both students and teachers’ perception about democratic classroom practices

2. Methodology
This study assessed the level of democratic classroom practices adopted by Civic Education teachers in South East Nigeria. This section gives details of the sample size and sampling techniques, method of data collection and method of data analysis.

The study adopted a mixed method of quantitative and qualitative approaches to address the objectives of the study. The instruments for data collection were two sets of Democratic Classroom Questionnaire (DCQ) containing different questions for the teachers and students. The instrument had two sections each. Section 1 elicited responses about their biodata while this section elicited responses’ application of democratic classroom practices and perceptions. The items in the instrument were adopted from already existing literature. Qualitative data were drawn from four focus groups (FGDs). The instruments (DCQ for teachers and DCQ for students) were validated by three lecturers in the Department of Arts and Humanities Education of Alex-Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu. Alike, Abakaliki. Based on their recommendations, adjustments were made on the instruments. Face-to-face pilot test of the survey instruments was conducted to evaluate their usability. The reliability of the sampling was tested using standard analysis with Cronbach’s alpha. It yielded a coefficient reliability index of 0.82 (DCQ for teachers) and 0.70 (DCQ for students) showing an adequacy of the instruments.

The multistage sampling technique was employed during data collection. Civic Education teachers and Senior Secondary One (SS1) students from randomly selected public secondary schools in the five South Eastern states of Nigeria participated in the study. For sampling of students, three education zones were randomly selected from each of the five SE states of Nigeria. Intact classes from four urban schools were randomly selected in each zone while 120 students from the four schools of each zone were selected making a total of 360 students from each state. This was done in four out of the five states while in the fifth state, 260 students were selected from the three education zones. Greater sample size came from the fifth state given that it was the Southeastern State with the largest population. In total, a number of 1,700 students were selected and administered with the instrument. Out of this number, only 1,400 students returned their questionnaires. Only urban schools were selected given their easy access in terms of road network and larger population.

For selection of teachers, multistage sampling technique was adopted too in the five SE states. Three education zones were randomly selected from each of the five SE states of Nigeria. From each of the education zones of each state was selected five schools while 11 teachers were randomly selected from the five schools of each zone making a total of 33 teachers from the three selected education zones of each state. This was done in four out of the five states while in the fifth state, 28 teachers were selected from the three education zones. In total, a number of 160 teachers were selected and administered with the instrument. Coincidentally only 151 questionnaires were returned. The rationale for choice of South East Nigeria was for convenience in data collection as it is not feasible to cover the entire federation.

Descriptive statistics, frequency counts and percentages were used to answer the research questions while Independent t-Test was used to test the Null Hypothesis. Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data. Due to COVID-19 outbreak and near closure of schools, a large number of students had remained absent from school within the days schools were visited for an oral interview. As such, only group of four students from each selected school was purposefully selected and interviewed to get a quick overview on what their perceptions are about teachers and classroom democratic practices. The interviewees were promised that their responses were to be kept confidential for research purposes. With due permission granted by them, the interviews were...
recorded. Interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. The recorded information was transcribed. The researchers built meaning from student responses as themes were allowed to emerge from the data (Patton, 2002). Afterwards, the researchers followed the analytical procedure described by Rubin and Rubin (1995). Core concepts were identified at the first reading of the transcribed information. There was a second reading which gave room for the revision of the core concepts and concepts with common or similar ideas were grouped together as themes to reflect the students’ perceptions on classroom democratization.

3. Results
Study assessed the level of democratic classroom practices adopted by Civic Education teachers in South East Nigeria. This section presents findings/results on the level of classroom democratization by teachers of Civic Education, students’ perception about democratization of classroom, teachers’ perception of classroom democratization, challenges confronting teachers in the process of democratization and result of comparison test of students and teachers' perception levels.

3.1 Background information of respondents
Table 1 shows that a total number of 800 male and 600 female students were interviewed from the 60 randomly selected secondary schools. Similarly, a total number of 59 male teachers and 92 female teachers from randomly selected 75 schools were equally interviewed.

Table 2 shows an acceptable level of democratic practices by civic education teachers in South East Nigeria. They apply the listed practices in their classroom with mean values above the acceptable mean value of 2.50 and an aggregate mean value /standard deviation of 2.50 (0.39).

Table 3 reveals that civic education students in South East Nigeria support the adoption of democratic practices in their classroom with a general perception mean of 3.80 and standard deviation of 0.85. This indicates that students concurred with the idea of democratizing their classrooms to enable them become actively involved.

Table 4 shows that civic education teachers in South East Nigeria possessed a positive perception of democratic classroom practices with an aggregate perception mean score of 3.97 and a standard deviation of 0.37. This stemmed from the high mean score displayed across all factors as indicated on the table.

Figure 1 reveals that the biggest challenge confronting Civic Education teachers is the feeling that their power as a teacher may become jeopardized when they give students opportunity to actively participate in the classroom with 146 (96.7%) of the teachers agreeing and strongly agreeing to that. On the other hand, lack of competence on how to incorporate those democratic methods in the classroom posed the least challenge to 126 (83.5%) teachers.

To find out if there is a significant difference between students and teachers’ perceptions on classroom democratization, an independent sample t-test was done comparing their mean values.

| Table 1. Total of male and female SS1 students, male and female teachers involved in the study |
|---------------------------------------------------------|
| **Gender** | **Students** | **Teachers** | **Total** | **Percentage (%)** |
| Male | 800 | 59 | 859 | 55.4 |
| Female | 600 | 92 | 692 | 44.6 |
| Total | 1400 | 151 | 1551 | 100 |
Table 2. Level of democratic practices (collaboration, freedom, critical thinking and decision-making) applied in southeast Nigerian secondary schools

| Component                  | N  | M (SD)   | Lower  | Upper  | Sig  |
|----------------------------|----|----------|--------|--------|------|
| Freedom                    | 1400 | 1.95 (0.81) | 1.91 | 2.00    |      |
| Collaboration              | 1400 | 2.53 (1.31) | 2.48 | 2.58    |      |
| Equality                   | 1400 | 2.62 (1.39) | 2.54 | 2.69    |      |
| Decision Making            | 1400 | 2.88 (1.51) | 2.83 | 2.92    |      |
| General Democracy          | 1400 | 2.50 (0.39) | 1.87  | 3.12    | .001 |

Table 3. Responses of mean and standard deviation on students’ perception about democra-  

tization of their classrooms

| Component                  | N  | M (SD)   | Lower  | Upper  | Sig  |
|----------------------------|----|----------|--------|--------|------|
| Freedom                    | 1400 | 4.09 (1.31) | 4.05 | 4.13    |      |
| Active Participation       | 1400 | 2.53 (1.31) | 3.87 | 3.97    |      |
| Generating Ideas           | 1400 | 4.26 (1.08) | 4.20 | 4.31    |      |
| Classroom Discussion       | 1400 | 4.30 (1.17) | 4.24 | 4.36    |      |
| General Perception         | 1400 | 3.80 (0.85) | 2.45  | 5.14    | .003 |

Table 4. Result of mean and standard deviation analyses of Civic Education teacher’s per-  
ception about democratic classroom practices

| Component                  | N  | M (SD)   | Lower  | Upper  |
|----------------------------|----|----------|--------|--------|
| I support classroom democratic practices | 151 | 3.54 (1.58) | 3.37 | 3.71 |
| Democratic classroom promotes effective learning | 151 | 3.80 (1.47) | 3.57 | 4.04 |
| Democratic classroom enhances performance | 151 | 4.19 (1.13) | 4.06 | 4.32 |
| It equips them with skills to defend their rights | 151 | 4.36 (0.92) | 4.21 | 4.51 |
| General Perception         | 151 | 3.97 (0.37) | 3.38 | 4.56 |

Table 5 shows the result of the research hypotheses. The result showed a significant value of .193 which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance for the study. This shows that there is no significant difference between the mean perception score of students and teachers on democratic classroom practices.

The FGD revealed that beyond quantitative findings of rare adoption of democratic classroom practices among Civic Education teachers, students would prefer adoption of these practices by
Figure 1. Constraints of practicing democracy in the classroom.

SD, Strongly Agree; D, Disagree; U, Undecided; A, Agree; SA, Strongly Agree. Q5= My power as a teacher may become jeopardized when I give students opportunity to actively participate in the classroom. Q4= Large class sizes can be a hindrance in practicing democracy in the classroom. Q3= I don’t know how to incorporate those democratic methods in the classroom. Q2= I don’t have the patience to tolerate students mistakes in the classroom. Q1= The struggle to finish my lesson within the allotted time does not allow me to apply those democratic methods.

Table 5. Summary of t-test for significance between students and teachers’ mean perception of democratic classroom practices

| Respondents   | N  | Mean | SD  | df  | Std. Error | t    | Sig  | Decision     |
|---------------|----|------|-----|-----|------------|------|------|--------------|
| Teachers      | 151| 3.97 | .37 | 10.11| .6303      | -.383| .193| Accept H01   |
| Students      | 1400| 3.80 | .85 |     |            |      |      |              |

their teachers. This is evidenced in the three themes that emerged during the thematic analysis of the focused group data. These themes are building consciousness and attentiveness, encouraging cooperation, equity and fairness.

4. Building consciousness

One of the students had this to say:

As a student, I strongly believe that if our Civic Education teachers begin to adopt democratic practices when in the classroom, there will be difference in the way we feel … within ourselves and even when we are with other students or other people. Because we know that we may be expected to make a contribution in a discussion, we will always pay attention to what is being talked about or discussed. We shall learn how to express ourselves outside our classrooms, we shall develop the boldness to do this … simply because we have become used to active participation during an on-going lesson in the classroom. But sometimes you find out that what the teacher does in the class does not encourage active participation.

This also reflects in one participant’s comment:

In my own school, whenever it is Civic class, I begin to feel unhappy … because my teacher makes it a dull moment for us all. She comes and dictates notes and sometimes reads from her textbook. She does not give you the opportunity to ask a question. Any attempt on the part of the teacher to do so, she tells you that time is against her … and that she has another class afterwards. She doesn’t even ask you any question on what she has taught. In this case, how will
the students learn since they are shut up, no discussion, no questioning etc.

5. Encouraging cooperation
Another student had this to say

... Sometimes in the class, every child turns into a one man-alone. I mean everyone on his or her own business because the teacher does not allow us to talk to each other, or ask one another question either on an area of confusion or something else. Students gradually are lacking the skill for cooperation as a result of this. But if the teacher can begin to share us into groups for probably group assignments, group discussions, numbered head together activities or even jigsaw activities, then we shall gradually learn the cooperative skills which will really be of help to us in future. Cooperative skills will equip us greatly to comfortably work with any kind of person.

6. Equity and fairness

If our Civic Education teachers can begin to practice more democracy in the classroom especially when they are teaching the subject which centers mainly on equity and fair human treatment, you will find everyone in the class being happy and comfortable. Nobody will feel let down in the class or feel like a second-class citizen because we are all treated equally. If they allow us to participate in deciding what we are to learn at any time, it will give us more confidence in ourselves that we are being recognized by the school ... by our teachers and stuffs like that. In fact, it will make me to develop more interest in the subject because there is a change now

In a similar statement, one of the interviewees noted as follows:

In fact, I think that our school head (principal) should make it compulsory that from now henceforth, every Civic Education teachers’ should as a matter of urgency re-strategize how to deliver lessons in this subject. I believe that when the appropriate teaching methods are adopted by our teachers, it will reflect in the skills we shall acquire, it will reflect in the way we treat others in and outside the school and in our disposition when we meet with others.

7. Discussion

7.1. Level of democratic practices in South East Nigerian secondary schools by civic education teachers

Result has shown on a general basis that civic education teachers in South East Nigeria practiced democracy in the classroom though on a marginal level (mean component level: 2.50). This finding is in tandem with Hahn (2015) who reported that Danish Civic Education and English teachers adopted democratic practices such as group work and project work in civic classes. Democratic practices in the classroom bring about transformation and social change which translates into grooming socially responsible and active citizens who can critically reflect on societal issues (Banks, 2017). Schuitema et al. (2018), have posited that opportunities should be created for all students to express their points of view in the process of learning. On the other hand, the finding of this study is contrary to that of Magasu et al. (2020) who reported the use of teacher-centered method of teaching by Civic Education teachers. Similarly, Guilfoile and Delander (2014:4) asserted that the most commonly used traditional method of instruction by Civic Education teachers is lecture method which does not encourage active participation or stimulation of creative minds and critical thinking in students. However, combination of lecture or traditional teaching methods with active learning methods and video teaching which will foster an open classroom climate (i.e., encouraging students’ input) seems to be most fruitful (Martens & Jason, 2013). Sadly enough, reasons for continuous use of traditional/lecture methods which do not actively engage students in critical and reflective thinking could be as a result of students’ and
teachers’ insufficient mindfulness of the student’s right to a democratic space in the classroom (Daher, 2019)

Regardless of the general democracy, the student respondents in this study (N = 1400) reported a lack of freedom in their classrooms. It is observed that students did not enjoy enough freedom in class with a mean component level of 1.95. Unfortunately, this is so despite policy directions on integration of democratic practices and current changes in curriculum and technology (Martens & Jason, 2013). This perhaps explains why we have a high level of crime in the society ranging from fanaticism, terrorism, kidnapping, robbery and other criminal offences. Rich, (1959) has observed one of the focal points of democratic education as the problem of classroom freedom. He enumerated the different aspects of freedom to include freedom from autocratic imposition of subject-matter, freedom of expression by the student, freedom for him to develop his unique abilities, and others.

7.2. Students’ perception about classroom democratization
This study observed a willingness and support of Civic Education students for the adoption of democratic practices by their teachers considering the general perception mean of 3.80. The Students perceived that it would be worthwhile giving them opportunity/freedom which includes expressing themselves in the class, developing their exceptional abilities, generating their own personalized ideas on the subject matter and having classroom discussions with fellow students. This finding is supported by Ahmad et al. (2015) who reported that both female and male students in their study perceived democratic classroom environment as playing a great role in improving students’ social skills development. Majority of the students agreed that they listen to one another carefully during a classroom discussion in a democratic classroom. Such classroom discussions encourage students’ inputs in an ongoing discourse (Martens & Jason, 2013). When quality Civic Education is offered to the learners, it will increase citizenship knowledge and engagement, expand civic equality … and possibly reduce the dropout rate and improve school climate (Guifoile & Delander, 2014:3). To this end, Schuitema et al. (2018) have suggested that opportunities should be created for students to express their viewpoints and create meanings in their learnings. This is much possible within the school environment. The school serves as a minute democratic society which offers students opportunity to learn and practice the skills needed for democratic living (Dewey, 1916) and ultimately to become better democratic citizens (Morrison, 2008).

7.3. Civic education teacher’s perception of a democratic classroom practice
Result revealed a positive perception by the teachers and support for the adoption of democratic practices in the classroom. They highly believed that democratizing classrooms equips learners with skills to defend their rights, promotes effective learning and enhances performance. This is in tandem with Davies et al. in Hahn (2015) who reported that civic education teachers were in support of adopting democratic practices in the teaching of civic education since citizenship aroused in the students’ concern for the welfare of others, moral and ethical behavior, and tolerance of diversity within society. Similarly, other researchers like Sincer et al. (2019) reported the derivatives of applying democratic practices to include development of intrapersonal skills such as independence, regulation of feelings and knowing one’s own competences among others. School administrators and the teachers are of the view that democratizing the classroom enables students to express their opinions and contribute in various issues relating to their education and well-being in school (Hahn, 2015). This appears to reiterate the objectives of teaching Citizenship education by UNESCO which includes; learning to exercise one’s judgment and thinking faculty and acquiring a sense of individual and community responsibilities (UNESCO, 2010). All bring about a promising classroom climate.
7.4. Challenges facing adoption of democratic classroom

Results revealed that all items were positively agreed to by the teachers as challenges they are faced with when attempting to implement democratic classroom practices. However, the biggest challenge confronting Civic Education teachers is the feeling that their power as a teacher may become jeopardized when they give students opportunity to actively participate in the classroom. This result could possibly explain the reason for the poor level of freedom accorded to students by their teacher as was revealed in Table 1. One may assume that this kind of feeling by teachers reveals a lack of adequate training of the teachers on how to implement reflective practices such as classroom democratization. This implies a lack of confidence or a complex problem on the part of the teachers. Above finding is corroborated with that of Lawthong (2010) who reported gaps in teachers’ confidence, knowledge, and skills in applying the democratic classroom practices as a challenge. Other researchers have reported students’ and teachers’ insufficient awareness of the student’s right to a democratic space in the classroom (Daheir, 2019), students’ misinterpretation of the teachers’ request for democratic input as weakness or unpreparedness as such evading the opportunity (Morrison, 2008) and tension between freedom of exploring student opinions and curriculum delivery constraints (Howe & Abedin, 2013:341) as reasons for not adopting democratic classroom practices by Civic Education teachers. As a way forward, Osman (2013) opined that teachers should be protected from censorship or restraint that unreasonably interferes with their obligation to expose students to controversial issues and to help students express their own views on such issues.

8. Conclusion

The study looked at Civic Education teachers and the application of democratic practices (collaboration, freedom, critical thinking, and decision-making) in South-East geo-political zone of Nigeria. From the findings, it is observed that Civic Education teachers in South East Nigeria apply democratic practices in the classroom. However, this application appeared to be very marginal. By implication, soliciting students’ voices and choices in the classroom lies somehow outside the educational norms of our society. The consistent use of other methods which are not student centered or engaging does not encourage the development of critical thinking skills of Nigerian students. It does not also equip them with the necessary skills with which they can meaningfully engage in democratic activities in the real world. Not much character transformation seems to have been achieved considering the level of crime in the Nigerian society. There is thus a clarion call for education which teaches students their rights and privileges as well as obligations to the state to become more engaging and democratic. This calls for a paradigm shift from being the sole source of knowledge to a facilitator for all teachers. Teachers are encouraged to improve on the adoption of democratic classroom practices in teaching especially in subjects like Civic Education so as to reduce the nuisance factors (especially kidnapping, stealing and obtaining by tricks) of our today's youths. Inclusion of more of the democratic practices would nurture in the students the patriotic feelings of love for one another and love for their country and the world at large. Furthermore, our study contributes to knowledge about teaching of Civic Education in Nigerian secondary schools and democratic classroom practices.

8.1. Recommendations

The findings and implications of this study recommend the development of an education policy in Nigeria which will aim at encouraging teachers to operate open and democratic classrooms. This will afford teachers opportunity of having student engaged classrooms so as to produce people who shall become transformed citizens able to defend their rights, and able to find a place in the world market. Civic Education teachers should be properly trained through workshops with the goal to increase their awareness of democratic practices and pedagogic approaches that enhance student agency and voice, in order to groom critically thinking democratic citizens. Concerted efforts are encouraged on the part of Civic Education teachers to ensure that students who are taught this subject will grow up to become better citizens of tomorrow equipped with needed twenty-first-century skills. Such views will enable them do away with authoritarian teaching and embrace a more democratic approach. In conclusion if we trust the capacity of the human individual for developing his own potentiality, then we
can provide him with many opportunities and permit him to choose his own way and his own direction in his learning. In conclusion, the researchers see a brighter future for secondary school students as conducive atmosphere of learning is insured through practicing adequate democracy in the classroom.

8.2. Limitations

Items on the Democratic Classroom Questionnaire (DCQ) for students which yielded a coefficient reliability index of 0.70 could not furthermore be modified due to the limited time the researchers had to complete the study before the complete lockdown of schools declared by the Federal Government of Nigeria, in March 2020 given the outbreak of COVID-19.

8.3. Suggestion for further studies

There is a need to assess the training needs of teacher trainees in terms of what additional skills they need to be equipped with to enable them become effective teachers who can groom the upcoming youths to become responsible and transformed citizens of the society. Such trainings will avail the trainee teachers’ opportunities of learning how to apply democratic practices in their classrooms not only in Civic Education but in all classroom situations.

Funding

The authors received no direct funding for this research.

Author details

Cresantus N. Biamba1,2
E-mail: cresantus.biamba@hig.se
ORCID ID: http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3571-0347
Obiabna N. Chidimma2
Ogunji V. Chinwe2
Mezeobi C. Kelechi2
Nwojuaba A. Chinyere2
1 Department of Educational Sciences, University of Gavle, Sweden.
2 Department of Educational Foundation, Alex Ekbuwe University, Ndufu - Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

Citation information

Cite this article as: Assessing democratic classroom practices among secondary school civic education teachers in the global south: case study of South East Nigeria, Cresantus N. Biamba, Obiabna N. Chidimma, Ogunji V. Chinwe, Mezeobi C. Kelechi & Nwojuaba A. Chinyere, Cogent Education (2021), 8:1896425.

References

Ahmad, I., Said, H., & Jusoh, A. (2015). Empirical evidence on the relationship between democratic classroom and social skills development of students. Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences, 6(2), S1.
Apple, M., & Beane, J. (2007). Democratic schools lessons in powerful education (2nd ed. ed.). Heinemann.
Banks, J. A. (2017). Failed citizenship and transformative civic education. Educational Researcher, 46(7), 36–377. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X17726741
Barnes, C. (2011). Civic education: The need is great, and so is the desire to help. American Bar Association, 35 (3). https://www.americanbar.org/groups/bar_services/publications/bar_leader/2010_11/3503/civics/
Buchholz, B. (2013) Co-constructing a student – lead discussion: Students and teachers talk in a democratic classroom. Working papers in literacy, culture and language education [MPLCLE], 2 May 2013, pp 155–184
Cooperation for National and Community Service [NCNC 2005:1]
Cortland Education Document. (2015). A democratic classroom environment. Sunny Cortland Education Press.
Dohrer, W. (2019). Assessing students' perceptions of democratic practices in the mathematics classroom. Paper presented at the Eleventh Congress of the European Society for Research in Mathematics Education, Utrecht, The Netherlands, Feb 6–10, 2019.
Dewey, J. (1916). Democratic Education. Macmillan.
Gainous, J., & Martens, A. M. (2016). Civic education: Do liberals do it better? Journal of Political Ideologies, 21 (3), 261–279. https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2016.1205965
Guilfoile, L., & Delander, B. (2014). Guide Book: Six proven practices for effective civic learning. National center for learning and civic engagement.
Hahn, C. L. (2015). Teachers’ perceptions of an education for democratic citizenship in schools with transnational youth: A cooperative study in the UK and Denmark. Research in Comparative & International Education, 10(1), 95–119. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745499114567821
Hand, M., & Levinson, R. (2012). Discussing controversial issues in the classroom. Educational Philosophy and Theory, 9(6), 614–629. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-9476.2010.00732.x
Howe, C., & Abedin, M. (2013). Classroom dialogue: A systematic review across four decades of research. Cambridge Journal of Education, 43(3), 325–356. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2013.786024
Kincal, R., & Isik, H. (2003). DemokratikEgitimvedemokratikdegeeler. Democratic Education and Democratic values [EgitimVeDemokratikCevreler] (Eurasian Journal of Educational Research, 11, 54–58.
Knowles, R. T. (2017). Teaching who you are: Connecting teachers’ civic education ideology to instructional strategies. Theory & Research in Social Education, 191(1), 1–42.
Knowles, R. T., Torney-Purta, J., & Barber, C. (2018). Enhancing citizenship learning with international comparative research: Analyses of IEA civic education dataset.Citizenship, Teaching & Learning, 13(1), 7–30.
Lawthong, N. (2010). Pedagogies for citizenship education in Thailand: The gap between government policy and implementation. In K. J. Kennedy, W. O. Lee, & D. L. Grossman (Eds.), Citizenship pedagogies in Asia and the Pacific (pp. 203–220). Comparative Education Research Centre, The University of Hong Kong. Springer.
Louis, K. S. (2003). Democratic values, democratic schools. Reflections in an international context. In J. M. L. Moss (Ed.), Democratic learning: The challenge to school effectiveness (pp. 74–94). Routledge and Kegan Paul.
Magasu, O., Muleya, G., & Mweemba, L. (2020). Teaching strategies used in civic education lessons in
secondary schools in Zambia. *International Journal of Research* - GRANTHAALAYAH, 8(2), 39–46. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3692546.

Martens, A. M., & Jason, G. (2013). Civic education and democratic capacity: How do teachers teach and what works? *Social Science Quarterly, 94*(4), 956–976. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6237.2012.00864.x

Molinari, L., Marnelli, C., & Gnisci, A. (2013). A sequential analysis of classroom discourse in Italian primary schools: The many faces of the IRF pattern. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 83*(3), 414–430. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.2012.8279.2012.02071.x

National Population Commission (Nigeria) & RTI International. (2016). *Nigeria Education Data Survey Education Profile*. United States Agency for International Development.

Nichols, S. L., & Beliner, D. C. (2007) Collateral damage: How high stakes testing corrupts America’s schools. Havard Education Press Retrieved 20/March/2020 from https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2007-03254-000

Osman, A. A. (2013). Freedom in teaching and learning. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 3* (2), 142. Special Issue

Pane, D. M. (2010). Viewing classroom discipline as negotiable social interaction: A communities of practice perspective. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 26*(1), 87–97. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2009.05.002

Parker, W. C. (2010). Listening to strangers: Classroom discussion in democratic education. *Teachers College Record, 112*(13), 2815–2832

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation (3rd ed. ed.).* SAGE.

Reichert, F., & Print, M. (2018). Civic participation of high school students: The effect of civic learning in school. *Educational Review, 70*(3), 318–341. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2017.1316239

Reichert, V. B., & Torney-Purta, J. (2019). A cross-sectional comparison of teachers’ beliefs about the aims of civic education in twelve countries: A person centered analysis. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 77*, 112–125. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2018.09.005

Rich, J. M. (1959). The problem of freedom in the classroom. *Peabody Journal of Education, 36*(6), 353–355. https://doi.org/10.1080/01619565909536872. Published online: 04 Nov 2009

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (1995). Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data. Sage.

Schuitema, J., Rodstake, H., Van De Pol, J., & Veugelers, W. (2018). Guiding classroom discussions for democratic citizenship education. *Educational Studies, 44*(4), 377–407. https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2017.1373629

Sincer, I., Severiens, S., & Volman, M. (2019). Teaching diversity in citizenship education: Context-related teacher understandings and practices. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 78*, 183–192. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2018.11.015

Tonga, D. (2014). How can we get the information about democracy? The example of social studies prospective teachers. *Zeitschrift für die Welt der Türken*/ *Journal of World of Turks, 6*(2), 265–277.

Trafford, B. 2008. Democratic schools towards a definition. J. Arthur., I. Davies, & C. Hahne, Eds.. Ünal, F., & Kaygin, H. (2020). Citizenship education for adults for sustainable democratic societies. *Sustainability, 12*(56), 1–19.

UNESCO. (2010) Citizenship education for the 21st century. http://www.unesco.org/education/tlsf/mods/theme_b/interact/mod07/task03/appendix.htm