DEMOCRATIC CAPITALISM AND NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
The myriad of developmental problems confronting the Nigerian state has continued to attract critical research attention. Consequently, the nature of the democratic project in the country has been the subject of debate in various circles. This has led to the supposition of democratic capitalism as the possible underlining tendency of democracy in Nigeria. With current research interests in educational foundation and social administration, attempt is made at an examination of the linkages between democratic capitalism and national educational challenges in Nigeria. Findings of the study suggest that democratic capitalism has resulted in the current national educational challenges in Nigeria. Finally on the way forward, it is recommended that the focus of education should be essentially entrepreneurial in character.

Keywords: Democratic capitalism, challenges, education, elite

Introduction
The myriad of developmental problems confronting the Nigerian state has continued to attract critical research attention, particularly since the year, 1999 which marked a watershed in the history of modern Nigeria. In that year the country ushered in what was expected to be an ‘enduring democracy’. Before then, the Nigerian state had oscillated between civil and military rule, with the latter having the upper hand. Since 1999, however, Nigeria has been enjoying uninterrupted democratic governance (Omotoso, 2013). According to Aderonke (2012) Nigeria’s present democratization, which culminated in the country’s Fourth Republic on May 29, 1999, started amidst great hope and expectations. Since then, the nature of the democratic project has been the subject of debate in various circles. Democracy is a vital instrument that propels political proficiency, economic development and social stability of any nation-state (Aderonke, 2012). Regrettably however, argues Nwalonue and Ojukwu (2012; cited in Aderonke, 2012), the practice of the so-called democracy in the 21st Century Nigeria, is intrinsically characterized by political instability, social acabre, cultural balderdash and economic quagmire; resulting in unemployment of all forms, leading to abject hunger and indescribable poverty. The attendant implication of this misnomer is practical existence of all manner of crimes such as kidnapping, armed robbery, prostitution, sexual slavery, pen-robbery, and electioneering bickering and hooliganism (Nwalonue and Ojukwu, 2012).

Weighty contentions such as in Nwalonue and Ojukwu (2012) have invariably attracted the curiosity of the current researchers, as to the generic character of democracy in Nigeria. This led to the supposition of democratic capitalism as the possible underlining tendency of democracy in Nigeria. With current research interests in educational foundation and social administration, we proceeded to attempt an examination of the linkages between democratic capitalism and national educational challenges in Nigeria. This becomes the general objective of the study. The specific objectives therefore are to: (i) examine the relationship between democratic capitalism and national educational challenges in Nigeria and (ii) make recommendations on the way forward in the relationship between democratic capitalism and national educational challenges in Nigeria. The study adopts as methodology, the critical mode of research. The theoretical framework for the study is the elite theory.

Democratic capitalism
Democratic capitalism...is far more than an economic system: it is a dynamic complex of economic, political, moral-cultural, ideological, and institutional forces (Younkers, 1998). According to Novak (1982, 1989, 1991 and 1993), generically cited in Younkers (1998) democratic capitalism is an amalgam of three systems: (1) an economy based predominantly on free markets and economic incentives; (2) a democratic polity; and (3) a classical-liberal moral-cultural system which encourages pluralism.

The free market creates an intricate web of supply and demand relationships and fosters economic growth, social mobility, and innovation. Political liberty allows for a constitutional system of government in which both individuals and groups are represented. The moral-cultural sphere, which includes values such as a work ethic, individual initiative, honesty, and respect for private property, is supported by the mediating institutions of family, church, and numerous other voluntary associations. Furthermore, Streeck (2011) cited in Okeke (2014a) has characterized democratic capitalism as follows: a political economy ruled by two conflicting principles or regimes of resource allocation: one operating according to marginal productivity or what is revealed as merit by a free play of market forces and the other following social need or entitlement, as certified by the collective choices of democratic politics. Governments under democratic capitalism are under pressure to honor both principles simultaneously, although substantively the two almost never agree - or they can afford to neglect one in favor of the other only for a short time until they are punished by the consequences, political in the one case and economic in the other (Streeck, 2011). Democratic capitalism therefore refers to a complex web of democratic and capitalist tendencies in a given society or polity.

**The concept of education**

On the concept of education, Okeke (2014b) has posited as follows: Education, it has been contended, is a systematic procedure for the transfer and transformation of culture, through formal or informal training of people in a society. It deals with the mental, physical, psychological and social development of the citizens in a given society. The goal of education is manpower development, aimed at national growth and development (Enamiroro, 2007). According to Anya (2008), education is the fundamental cultural process that prepares an individual to live and work, function and survive in a given society. Anya (2008:3) further conceptualizes education as an instrument for inducing social change. Furthermore, Fafunwa (1983) cited in Enamiroro (2007), sees education as all positive efforts, conscious and direct, incidental and indirect, made by a given society to accomplish certain objectives that are considered desirable, in terms of the individual’s needs as well as the needs of the society where the programme is based. Enamiroro (2007) further cites Ebong (1996) to describe education as a powerful instrument for the development of man and the society. In addition, Muoghalu (2013) opines that education is a tool for empowerment, emancipation and national development; that education constitutes one of the critical foundations for any meaningful socio-economic transformation of any country.

Hence, education presupposes a comprehensive national system and a functional national structure, such that education and national development are inextricably interwoven (Emeh et al., 2011). Moreover, education can be regarded as the key that unlocks the development of personal and national potential and all kinds of rights and powers. The increasing awareness of the importance of education to the upliftment of the individual and societal standards has awakened in people and nations a conscious effort at devoting their meager resources to acquiring qualitative education (Akindutire and Ekundayo, 2012). Fundamentally therefore, education must be qualitative in order to pass the test of functionality. In order words, the non-qualitative education is a contradictory coinage.

**Tenets of the Elite Theory and the application in the study**

Okeke (2014c) has highlighted the tenets of elite theory as follows: Higley (2010) posits that elite theory’s origins lie most clearly in the writings of Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941), Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), and Robert Michels (1876-1936). It has however, also been posited that perhaps, the
classic expression of elite theory can be found in C. Wright Mills’s *The Power Elite* (Henry, 2001). Elites derive from a fundamental and universal fact of social life, namely, the absence in any large collectivity of a robust common interest (Higley, 2010). According to Arowolo and Aluko (2012), the elite theory is a philosophical explanation of the role of the leadership in governance as it affects public policy including all socioeconomic and political matters. Elites accordingly, dominate the formal institutions of government and are a determining factor in governance and decision-making processes. Elites are the decision makers in the society whose power is not subject to control by any other body in the society (Arowolo and Aluko 2012). Citing Ikelegbe (1994), Arowolo and Aluko (2012) further highlights as follows: The elite theory postulates that public policy reflects the values and preferences of the elite rather than demands of the masses. The elite consist of those few individuals who wield powers and hold leading positions in the strategic aspects of society. The majority, the masses, only obeys and are guided, controlled and governed by the few. Many of the elites do not hold formal or legal authoritative powers but are rather behind the scene, teleguiding and manipulating overt political and policy actions. It is on the basis of presumptions that the masses are contented and are incapable of challenging the authoritative position of the elite that the elites dominate public policy and its processes (Arowolo and Aluko, 2012). Usually, elites have more money, more education and more status than the masses (Henry, 2001). The application of elite theory in our study is in the regard that the elite continues to protect the elitist status quo ante, under democratic capitalism are usually uninterested in promoting the course of massive qualitative education.

**Nigeria’s national educational challenges: a democratic capitalism thesis**

When the issue of Nigeria educational system today is raised, the first sets of thoughts that comes to mind are: decline in standard, deterioration of facilities, examination malpractices, mass promotion syndrome and the like, before any other thing else. This calls for an in-depth study and analysis aimed at tutoring each and every stakeholders in the education system on how their actions and inactions have individually and collectively contributed to the collapsing state education in Nigeria (Odia and Omofonmvo ...., 2007). As a matter of fact, the collapsing state of education in Nigeria is a function of the contradictions of democratic capitalism. Indeed, for a graphical demonstration of the national educational challenges in Nigeria, the expositions of Ademola-Olateju (2013) show them to be the consequences of the contradictions inherent in democratic capitalism.

Democratic capitalism is a political economy ruled by two conflicting principles or regimes of resource allocation: one operating according to marginal productivity or what is revealed as *merit* by a free play of market forces and the other following social need or *entitlement*, as certified by the collective choices of democratic politics. Governments under democratic capitalism are under pressure to honor both principles simultaneously, although substantively the two almost never agree - or they can afford to neglect one in favor of the other only for a short time until they are punished by the consequences, political in the one case and economic in the other (Streeck, 2011). The incessant summersaults in Nigeria’s educational foundation is critically attributable to the democratic-capitalist pressure on various governance regimes in Nigeria, to operate according to a free play of market forces at a time and at another time to follow the dictates of social need or entitlement. Consequently, all kinds of digits have been assigned to "visions" like vision 2010, 2020 and so on. We got hung up on bombast instead of staying on point. These policy somersaults especially as they affect education have led to poor funding, decaying infrastructure, declining teacher quality, poor remuneration and the consequent poor student performance in WASC, NECO, JAMB and finally miseducated and unemployable graduates (Ademola-Olateju, 2013). Invariably, the Nigerian blind elite is fully interested in maintaining the status quo ante because, it is ironically from the miseducated and unemployable graduates that he recruits his less privileged guides (Okeke, 2014c). In essence, the answer to the national educational challenge, as elucidated in the foregoing, is to reverse its elitist hues.
Conclusion
The consequences of a poorly educated populace are dire, especially for a country desperately in need of foreign investment with a literacy rate of less than 60%. No matter how you dissect it, there is no short cut to national greatness. No nation can achieve meaningful socio-economic, political, technological and cultural advancement without solid educational investment in its citizens (Ademola-Olateju, 2013). Indeed, one of the most robust findings of contemporary social scientific inquiry is that as the gap between high-income and low-income families has increased, the educational and employment achievement gaps between the children of these families has increased even more (Muller, 2013:48). But this is only to the extent that our primary focus is on the formal structures of education.

Capitalists always have and will most likely continue to control democracy, much more so than the legislatures or the people who elected the legislatures and whom they represent. Lobbyists, with their seemingly endless support in the form of campaign donations, barter for the addition or removal of laws and for tax breaks that ultimately result in lucrative returns for the capitalists (Smith, 2005:90). Capitalists and the elite will also always want to influence the quality of education that is available to the hoi polloi. But this is only achievable by capitalists and the elite, to the extent that we are only referring to the current formal structures of education in Nigeria. To reverse its capitalist and elitist hues, the answer to the national educational challenge in Nigeria is a massive focus on entrepreneurial education, which must not be sought by the masses, in the orthodox formal structures of education; as the national educational orthodoxy in Nigeria is profoundly complicated by the contradictions of democratic capitalism.

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