Citation: Sifuna, D. (2020). Education for Democracy and Human Rights in Africa: English Speaking Countries. *Journal of Popular Education in Africa.* 4(5), 31 – 41.

Education for Democracy and Human Rights in Africa: English Speaking Countries

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Abstract
The paper attempts to discuss the concepts of democracy and human rights education. It is noted that the increasing clamour for good governance since the seventies through the eighties and nineties in Africa stemmed from two broad perspectives. First was the violations of basic individual freedom and rights and authoritarianism of the governments of the time. Second was the inability of most governments to improve the lives of their citizenry. Having arrived at political independence with the hope and promise of an increasingly better existence, the populace had been extremely disillusioned with the failure of their governments to deliver on their promises. During the liberation struggle, they had been promised that political independence would certainly improve their living conditions, but increasingly things had turned into a future of woes and uncertainties. There was therefore the general feeling that since the independence framework had failed to perform adequately, it should give way to a new paradigm of democracy and human rights. The paper also examines how current school organization is an obstacle to democratic and human rights education, and some successful examples of reform to promote such education as internationally advocated and spearheaded by the United Nations and its agencies.

Key Words: Africa, Education, Democracy, Human Rights, Ghana

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Introduction

The increasing clamour for democracy and good governance in Africa in the last one decade of the nineteenth century or so stemmed from two broad roots. Firstly, violations of basic individual freedom and rights and authoritarianism, have remained familiar traits of a majority of the governments in Africa. The strain of this style of governance has prompted a call for greater responsiveness of political leadership, respect for human rights, accountability and a two-way channel of information sharing between the people and their leadership. There has been a call for adequacy of the legal system, laws and the independence of the judiciary, which serves to protect the ordinary citizen and the society against the oppression of the government, particularly of a corrupt and unpopular government (Wainaina et al 2011). These related issues of governance could only be guaranteed under a pluralistic political framework. The existence of choice in selecting those who will lead them, and the corollary existence of the chance to periodically review and renew or terminate the mandate given to the political leadership which should normally provide the basis for good governance.

The second and perhaps more profound reason for the clamour for democracy in Africa, has had to do with the inability of most African governments to improve the lot of the citizenry. Having arrived at political independence with the hope and promise of an increasingly better existence, the populace has been extremely disillusioned as it began to realize that independence was not delivering much as had been promised by political leaders (Harber, 2002). The populace was generally quick to realise that perhaps they were better off in the pre-independence or colonial period. During the liberation struggle they had been promised that things would certainly be better on attaining political independence. Many now regret the turn of events. The glorious future of milk and honey promised at the time of independence has turned in many instances into a future of woes and uncertainties (IDEA and UN 2013). The continuing clamour for democracy should therefore be seen in the context of perceived redemption. There is the general feeling that the previous framework, having had the chance of performing and having failed to perform adequately, should give way to democracy with the people themselves, and not just the elite determining how they should be governed (Wainaina et al 2011).

This article briefly discusses the concepts of democracy and human rights education, the limitations of schools in promoting such education and some successful examples of reform to promote education for democracy and human rights in Africa as internationally advocated and spearheaded by the United Nations and its agencies.

Democratic and Human Rights Education.

The intention of this article is not focus on the various meanings of democracy, however, a narrow political conception of 'democracy' would include the following features: the accountability of rulers through regularised multi-party, free and competitive elections; political

institutions and policies which reflect societal values as established and changed via formal electoral and legislative mechanisms; the freedom to associate and organise politically; and the rule of law (Brock-Utne, 2002). For democracy to flourish, there must be a politically literate and active citizenry, who take direct, personal responsibility in the workings of society including government. These are people who have a working knowledge of the aim and purpose of government, how it is constituted, maintained and renewed; how government policy is formulated and implemented; the nature and scope of government institutions, process and procedures and how they operate. It is emphasised that political literacy goes hand in hand with political action.

Knowledge of political processes and institutions that is not translated into action regularly is generally useless and dangerous. Therefore, democracy is sustained by people who care to find out, investigate and explore problems and issues in society and who are willing to come up with a plan of action for their resolution (Wainaina et al 2011). Such democratic behaviour is not genetically conditioned, inborn or inherited faculty. It is acquired or learned. This practice of democracy must therefore be taught to its practitioners. It belongs to the cultural patrimony of a people; where culture means what a person learns from, and in relation to his/her material and social environment. It refers to acquired knowledge; about what is good, bad, useful, what to do, when, and how. This culture or education is what fashions values, attitudes, beliefs, and habits of individuals and social groups. It is at the root of behaviour and conduct in society. It is through it that individuals and groups learn to recognise, accept and respect established social institutions and practices. For democracy to exist, survive and prosper, it requires that the people are imbued with democratic ethos. In other words, education and culture constitute fundamental foundations of democracy (Wainaina et al 2011).

With continuing clamour for democracy and human rights in Africa, democratic ethos cannot be left to the whims of socio-economic change. There should be a conscious attempt through the education system to create new citizens. In this process of political change, the importance of the attitudes of children need to be stressed. As it has been noted by Carson 2016, children develop new conceptions of what kind of person they are. They adopt new rules for conduct and acquire loyalties to new ideas and groups. More specifically, the importance of the school as a vital agent for bringing about democratic change has never been lost to the political elite. Some African governments have in the past used formal education as an essential instrument for promoting national harmony and it is now the time to be used to enhance democratic ideals (Sifuna, 2000).

The general perception is that education is a crucial element for democratization because it is within the education process that democratic habits are learned and cultivated. In order for education to have a meaningful impact on the prospects for sustainable democracy, for instance, education systems must support democratic principles and ideals. Procedural elements such as elections, voting, and political parties have dominated the democratic transition discourse of both traditional and contemporary scholars. In the African context democratization has often generally been judged by the regularity and presumed "freeness" of elections, as this has been perceived as a rejection of authoritarian rule of the single-party, military, or one-man rule and the embrace of democracy (Katz, 2012).

We need to appreciate that a great part of democratic legitimacy has been lacking in Africa is understandable given that that many citizens were socialized into an authoritarian post-colonial system that did not promote substantive democratic ideals. Many democratizing African countries have some attributes of democratic political life, including at least limited political space for opposition parties and independent civil society, as well as regular elections and democratic constitutions. However, they have suffered from a crisis of legitimacy which often includes poor representation of citizens' interests, low levels of political participation beyond voting, frequent abuse of the law by government officials and very low levels of public trust in state institutions (Katz, 2012).

On the other hand, the issue of human rights is inextricably related to democracy. As it has been explained by Landman (2018), human rights are those entitlements which are basic to being human and are not connected to the accident of being born in a certain country or with the skin of a particular colour. She pointed out that there is a basic core of universally agreed concept of human rights as well as a collection of documents in which they are expressed. The concept of human rights itself can be divided into several forms as well. Basic rights deal with the dignity and worth of the person; civil and political rights to participate in self-government; and social, economic and cultural rights on such matters as the right to work, to maintain one's culture and language and receive adequate education (Landman, 2018).

Democratic and human rights education as applied in this paper is a conscious effort, both through specific content as well as process, to develop in students an awareness of their rights and responsibilities, to sensitise them to the rights of others, and to encourage responsible action to secure the rights of all (Evans and Rose 2012). It is important that the youth in Africa are prepared for life in a democratic and pluralistic society. This becomes even more imperative as many of the African societies are plagued by intolerance and violence. Democratic and human rights education is well suited to develop respect for the dignity of the individual and the rights of others, to promote tolerance and acceptance of differences and to strengthen respect for fundamental freedoms. As such democratic and human rights education is a key element of the education process in the sense that it contributes to the full development of the human personality, building personal capacities and developing the attitudes, skills and knowledge which individuals and groups need to live in harmony in pluralistic societies. The significance of such teaching for society is underlined by the fact that democratic and human rights education can be reached through the classroom out into the community in ways which are highly beneficial to both (Evans and Rose 2012).

School Organizations as an Obstacle to Democratic and Human Rights Education.
Despite much lip-service to the ideals of education for democracy and human rights, the organizational model put forward by Western education is essentially authoritarian in nature. As observed, the hierarchical organization of the school is perhaps not the right setting for inculcating democratic values' (Harber, 2002). What characterises Western education, is not simply its authoritarianism structure, but it also takes the form of a bureaucracy, which is the dominant mode of organization in modern industrial societies. As Harber 2002), for example noted 'one of the most salient structural characteristics is the predominance in it of relatively

large- scale organizations with specialised functions which is loosely referred to as "bureaucracies". More specifically Tehin (2014) argued that it is the school which provides the child with his or her first experience of the norms of bureaucratic behaviour associated with the modern work place. He suggested that the school contributes to the learning norms of universalism as children become members of categories such as years, classes, and houses and that individuals do not warrant special treatment in the application of rules. They also learn to make the distinction between the person and the social role occupied for example; gender, race, religion, and others and become used to the notion of roles based on the division of labour according to function.

Secondary schooling in particular also involves an increasing amount of contact based on specificity to the task in hand such as a short period with a teacher of a particular subject rather than the more diffuse personal relationships of family and friends. Arguing along similar lines, Shipman (Hodkison 2015) suggested that schools have been organised to teach the impersonal contractual values and relationships that typify the transition from an agricultural to an industrial society. Thus the values that are enforced in the school are those which are needed for the efficient functioning of bureaucratic organizations and the maintenance of social order such as obedience, abiding by the rules, loyalty, respect for authority, punctuality, regular attendance, quietness, orderly work in large groups, working to a strict timetable, tolerance of monotony, the ability to change readily from one situation to the next and the ignoring of personal needs when these are irrelevant to the task at hand (Carson, 2016).

Colonial rule in Africa was criticised by Mamdani (2012) for not promoting the tolerant and participant political values required in a parliamentary democracy. Instead, through its authoritarian school structures, schools encouraged unquestioning acquiescence to authority. As it has been argued many times, the colonial state in Africa did not only need an 'educated native' but 'a loyal educated native'. This was to be achieved through education based on religious teaching. As it was noted, this principle enunciated was as valid in its future application to non-Christian mission as to mission schools (Mamdani, 2012). The policy was a result of the memorandum of British missionaries working in Africa to their government. It emphasized that there was an overwhelming weight of competent testimony that if education was not to be disruptive of morality and the social order, it had to be on a religious basis.

The British government therefore embraced missionary education because of its political and ideological usefulness since its imparted skills such as reading, writing and arithmetic as well as values which included loyalty to the existing order and disciplined self-sacrifice in the interest of that order. Lord Lugard one of the key architects of the British empire was clear in his appreciation of this idea in a discussion of the education of the sons of Fulani chiefs in Nigeria that they would be taught not merely to read and write, but to acquire an English Public Schoolboy's ideals of honour, loyalty and above all responsibility to the British administration in the Protectorate (Mamdani, 2012).

With regard to discipline in school, a military type of discipline was considered a necessary aspect of training Africans. It was argued that for the African in his primitive state, military or semi-military discipline makes a strong appeal and no better example could be found than the discipline of the military and police forces of the colonies which had been adopted in

government schools. The emphasis in most African educational institutions was therefore on blind obedience to school authority as constituted through prefects, teachers, and the head teachers which had a colonial base. This created unidirectional flow of orders and communication and provided no corresponding channels for the students to communicate with the authority (Carson, 2016).

Emphasis on loyalty as the basic tenet of colonial education reinforced the bureaucratic model of the Western school introduced in the colonies. The common pattern of schools in the English independent African countries was strict and puritanical in the moral code. Oversimplified religious instruction suggested that it was sinful to question authority, for it sprang from an infallible source in the Church for the Catholics and the Bible for the Evangelical Protestants. Unfortunately, this doctrinaire attitude had spilled over into the classroom, creating authoritarian pupil-teacher relations, an old-fashioned hierarchical, British house/prefects' system and too often a reliance on learning by rote memory (Carson, 2016). These school norms were hardly designed to prepare children for a free and democratic society. The new African leadership hardly questioned the colonial educational ethos. They were anxious to retain and enhance the bureaucratic hierarchical school structure as a way of inculcating among the pupils the sense of punctuality, honesty, obedience, hard work and respect for authority.

One aspect of the inherited school organization that has been criticised heavily as contravening democratic values is the existence of the prefect system. Most schools in the English-speaking African countries have some form of prefect system. The basic role of the prefects normally is to act as general agents of social control-checking lateness, reporting misbehaviour to teachers, organising the tidiness of the school compound and generally acting as messengers of the staff. Each class also usually has its own monitors responsible for making sure the classroom is tidy, that pupils are not noisy when the teacher is not present, collecting books and other assignments. Prefects usually have their authority reinforced by some sort of formalization which usually are their names being listed on the head teacher's notice board and often they are distinguished by a difference in their uniforms (Carson, 2016).

Some educators have proposed the setting-up of school councils as a way of introducing student participation in the governance of schools. Harber (2002), however, argued that there is a wide variety in the way school councils can be organised. On the one hand they may be safety valves where the head teacher or representatives of the staff listen to the grumbles of the pupils and explain problems away. On the other hand, the council may be run in a way that provides genuine feedback on legitimate pupil grievances in order to administer the school more efficiently. At the other extreme, there are the nearly autonomous pupil councils of some progressive schools. Harber further argued, where they existed in Britain, school councils tended towards the first two types rather than the last one, being more of the nature of channels of communication than of democratic decision-making. It was found out that in practice few were even an introduction to methods of democracy, as there was not much evidence that elections had taken place and usually the head could veto decisions by councils. This was no suggestion that school councils were necessarily a waste of time, but that in the overall contents of the formal school, their function was likely to tend towards the bureaucratic model than the democratic practice (Harber 2002).

In a study in Northern Nigeria, secondary school students were asked whether or not it was a good idea to have a school council. None of the schools studied had a school council. There was a strong approval of the idea. A majority of the students saw it either as a forum where complaints could be voiced and grievances settled or as a means by which pupils would have a better idea of what was going on in the school. In essence, the pupils liked the idea of a school council because channels of communication in the school were unsatisfactory (Harber, 2002). No mention was made of a school council as a way of familiarising pupils with election procedures nor as a way of being involved in democratic decision-making about school policy. Considering the way in which a school council is likely to operate, these students were said to have a limited realistic view of its benefits. Their experience of school had highlighted what is often one of the major constraints of bureaucratic operations which is that of communication. The school had made the pupils aware of its bureaucratic shortcomings, however, by itself it was unlikely to produce fervent demands for more democratic participation. To put it differently, schools by their bureaucratic nature and operation are not likely to instill democratic ideals in the students (Harber 2002).

Another important aspect of concern is one of education and rights of the student. As it has already been argued in this section, the school as a bureaucratic organization proceeds on the basis of written rules. The duty of the students to obey the rules is constantly stressed. Student rights are very much a minor concern, if indeed they are of any concern at all in most schools. It has been argued that organizationally most schools tend towards a model of authoritarian bureaucracy with decision being made by a few people at the top of the hierarchy and then executed down the chain of command. Post- primary schools in many of the English-speaking countries are very authoritarian. Physical punishment, carried out by teachers and senior students is administered freely. Lessons are very much teacher-centred with little student participation.

The overall result is an experience that encourages dependence and passivity rather than independence and self- discipline (Mwale and Libati, 2019). This authoritarian nature of schooling in African education systems is not likely to make it a source of awareness of citizen rights. Such an awareness is detested lest it contributes to increasing student unrest in schools. Hence, in this sense, political socialisation reinforces the duty of a citizen to the state, though alongside the traditional sense of duty to elders and parents in the various African cultures, which develops a sense of duty to more impersonal objects of rules, procedures and institutions.

The second level of influence is the official curriculum which lays emphasis on the role of the school in promoting national consciousness and loyalty through the manipulation of national symbols such as the flag, the loyalty pledge and the national anthem. There is also a strong emphasis on national unity and other duties of the citizen in textbooks (Mwale and Libati, 2019). The combined effect of these patterns of socialisation is that educated Africans who are predominantly from the school system tend to define their citizenship in relation to their duties but not to their social rights. This analysis has been supported overwhelmingly by a good number of studies. Generally, pupils regarded the important purpose of schooling as the creation of good citizens and obedience to authority whether of parents and teachers in the case of primary school pupils and discipline in the case of secondary students were the most frequently mentioned

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attributes of the best citizen. Such a kind of attribute is basically a passive orientation of the learners (Mwale and Libati, 2019).

Some Examples of Reform in Education for Democracy and Human Rights
The need for reform to promote education for democracy and human rights has internationally stemmed from the programmes of the United Nations. This has largely been due to the fact that human rights and education have gone hand in hand ever since the Charter of the United Nations (UN) was accepted in 1945. By signing the UN Charter, states committed themselves to cooperating with the UN to promote and achieve "*universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion*" (Horn 2009). The emphasis on education gained further momentum when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which was adopted in 1948. Long before the UN declared 1995–2004 the Decade for Human Rights Education, the UDHR and the Covenants placed education at the centre of human rights activities. The UDHR emphasises the importance of human rights education in its preamble as an element that is fundamental to developing a human rights culture. It was reckoned that:

> …the general assembly proclaims 'this universal declaration of human rights' as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms … (Horn 2009).

By the adoption of the UDHR, the General Assembly called on all nations "to cause it to be disseminated, displayed, read and expounded principally in schools and other educational institutions, without distinction based on the political status of countries or territories." The right to education and the teaching of human rights are intertwined. Children have a right to education, but the education that they ought to receive is not ideologically neutral as it is compelled to include education on human rights (Horn 2009).

However, despite these declarations, Africa is far from being a beacon of human rights and democratic conduct in education. A lack of knowledge and information is still a barrier preventing Africans from claiming and exercising their human rights. Despite the initial emphasis by the international community, the UDHR and the covenants on human rights training in international human rights law, it seems as if Africa has never really embraced it (Horn 2009). While it is caught up on the ratification of human rights treaties and the establishment of human rights commissions, Africa has not been able to practice and sustain human rights. An African human rights culture and a general knowledge of the rights of all people are still not fully developed.

In terms of promoting education for democracy and human rights, before the collapse of communism 1989, many of the African countries were governed by dictatorial regimes of varying orientations. By the mid-1990s, however, many responded to domestic and international pressures by holding competitive presidential or legislative elections. Since then Africa has

experienced a second liberation, with all that implies for a revival of democracy. Despite this, the transitions are far from being uniform. Some countries have advanced to more elective forms of democracy such as Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia Namibia and South Africa. Others have, however, been less successful and relapsed into the old repressive era; either slowly advancing towards democratic transitions or are neither dictatorial nor clearly headed toward democracy. Such countries among others include; Uganda, Zimbabwe, Sudan, Central African Republic and Ivory Coast. Nevertheless, there is an overwhelming outpouring of support for democracy as more and more citizens are rejecting the old dictatorial systems of African rule and are demanding a greater role in the determination of their futures (Katz, 2012). These developments in some countries have impacted on political consciousness of the wider society as well as a call for reform in education and other aspects of governance to enhance democracy and human rights (Bratton and Chang, 2006).

In the broader context of reform, Ghana is among the few countries which have embarked on the reform trajectory as many observers of its continued commitment to education have noted it to be closely linked to commitment to democracy. Having been the first of the former British dependencies in Africa to achieve independence and a real measure of internal self-governance, Ghana has long been regarded as a leader in African political and educational development. Despite the tradition of military rule, Ghanaians have a deep sense of political consciousness to which the values and principles of democracy are very important. For example, Ghanaians overwhelmingly supported the democratic political reforms of the 1990s, with a clear majority preferring democracy to any other form of government with popular perceptions of democracy tending to subscribe to universal notions of civil and voting rights, and equality of participation and representation (Katz, 2012).

A central objective of the constitutional reforms during Ghana's transition to civilian rule in the 1990s was the Free and Compulsory Universal Basic Education Programme (FCUBE). The FCUBE was conceived as a way to increase both the effectiveness of the teaching and learning tasks of the primary school system, as well as a response to the political changes initiated at the time (Ghana MoE, 1996). In an effort to promote a democratic culture in schools, the government encourages the setting up of civic and other social clubs to foster the principles of integrity, tolerance, and good-citizenship. In addition, it has allowed the school governing system to involve the student body representatives in decision-making and deliberations of school and educational governance. Apart from these provisions, since the establishment of the National Commission on Civic Education (NCCE), 850 civic education clubs have been created throughout Ghana with the specific aim of consolidating democracy through youth participation (Katz, 2012).

Overall, the evidence suggests that expanded educational opportunities would influence Ghanaians' attitudes to politics in general and democracy in particular. Results taken from a national survey sampling citizens' orientation to politics found out that, on the average, most Ghanaians (72 percent) were very strongly aware of the political world around them. Furthermore, regarding political knowledge, many knew their leaders and elected officials while some could impressively identify individuals who wield more power. It was noted that on average most Ghanaians support democracy and continue to have faith in representative politics,

as this is evident from the very high proportions of citizens' participation in elections (Katz, 2012).

Another good example in the enhancement of education for democracy and human rights is Botswana under its programme of Education for Kagisano (Social Harmony). The extent to which democracy is covered in Botswana's education system is explicitly set out in the goals of the Junior Secondary School programme and its Social Studies curriculum. According to the social studies curriculum, the Junior Secondary school system was to promote democracy through: An understanding of society, appreciation of culture, and sense of citizenship; and critical thinking, problem-solving ability, individual initiatives and interpersonal skills. Under the recommendation of the 1994 Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE) a three-year social studies syllabus was incorporated into the social studies curriculum as a means of encouraging democracy in the educational environment. The contents were meant to focus on the development of skills, values, and knowledge through which students were to demonstrate if they are to become informed and empowered Botswana citizens in the new millennium (Adeyemi and Asimeng-Boahane, 2001).

Among the stated aims of the programme emphasis was placed on understanding the concept of governance and the structure of government, as well as the concept of justice, good citizenship, and participation in the growth and development of society. Moreover, topics were geared toward teaching the obligations of citizens, the constitution, basic human rights and responsibilities, and separation and limitations of powers among the executive, the legislative, and the judiciary. Of the various objectives set out in the syllabus the relationship between education and democracy is made specific in pupils' visits to the local administrative units or *kgotla.* In keeping the tradition of consensus building, individuals converge at the *kgotla,* which is usually centrally located, to democratically resolve critical issues concerning the society. At the *kgotla* students were to broaden their understandings of concepts such as conflict resolution and decision-making, as well as the role of citizens' obligations to the democratic process (Makwinja, 2017).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The increased clamour for democracy and human rights in the governance of African countries suggests that education which is inextricably linked to the society should start inculcating such values. Education, by bringing a large proportion of the youth under its roof, is better placed to begin promoting democracy and human rights values in society. It is noted that Ghana, having reverted to civilian rule in the late 1980s, has made deliberate efforts to design an expansive educational system that can enhance its democracy and development. Botswana being one of the few African countries that has upheld democratic rule since independence, it devised an education model, Education for Kagisano (Social Harmony), as a means for nation-building, development, and promoting democracy. It is proposed that other African countries should emulate their examples.

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