

## Diversity in Democracy and Education: An African Perspective of Integrating Values

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**Abstract:** Democracy as a socio-political, system is so attractive that virtually every nation wants to be qualified as a democratic nation with democratic education. But, given the inevitable difference in nations' values and experiences, democracy cannot be the same in all nations; there must be diversity. In that wise, Africa and indeed Nigeria should consider it important to integrate their culture and traditional values with modern democracy especially given the challenges and failures confronting many democracies in Africa. In view of the above, this paper discussed the concept of democracy and democratic practices in Nigeria. The paper stated that Nigerians are not enjoying the dividends of democracy as expected because many Nigerian leaders and politicians are not practicing democracy with the mindset of an ideal African personality; the mindset of collective living with Nigerians; the mindset of openness and availability to Nigerians and the mindset of family tie and family spirit with Nigerians. In order to ameliorate the situation, the paper integrated the values of an ideal African personality with Nigeria's aspiration of building a democratic African nation and the liberal democratic values to conceptualize communal democracy as a custom fitted democracy for Nigeria. The paper highlighted the electoral implications of communal democracy and suggested educational measures to consolidate the democracy.

**Key words:** African personality, communal democracy

### 1. Introduction

Democracy as a socio-political system is quite attractive to many countries in the world. Every nation wants to be qualified as a democratic nation. No nation wants to be described as autocratic or authoritarian. No leader wants to be called a dictator or an oppressor even if their leadership styles suggest such. Every leader and indeed every Country wants to be in the good book of the international community as a democratic nation with democratic structures.

The African countries are not left out in the desire for democracy. Increasing poverty, endemic corruption, growing insecurity, seat-tight syndrome of Africa leaders among other things led to tremendous increase in the demand for improved governance and consequent rise of pro-democracy movement in the 1990s. On the external front, the pressure from the international scene for universal human freedom and life with dignity coupled with promises of improved bilateral relations for non-dictatorial states, stimulated the quest for democracy in Africa (Fayemi, 2009).

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Unfortunately, despite years of supposedly democratic governance in Africa, uncomplimentary pronouncements such as “democracy in Africa is laughable” by Victoria Nissi (Jackson, 2005, p. 1) cannot be avoided. But why is democracy so questionable in Africa? Is it that by nature Africa cannot sustain democracy? Why is democracy not yielding the desired socio economic development for the continent? Could it also be true that African countries are practicing the wrong type of democracy, given the assertion that democracy can only function effectively if it is made to “reflect the unique needs and culture of a given country” (USAID, 1999, p. 4).

The situation above makes related questions pertinent in Nigeria. After sixteen years of supposedly democratic governance, why is poverty increasing in the country? The National Statistical Bureau states, thus: 17 million Nigerians were poor in 1980; 40 million in 1992; and 112 million (69% of the population) in 2012. The increase in material poverty coupled with questionable elections, endemic corruption, different kinds of insecurity, high rate of unemployment, seat tight attitude of leaders e.t.c in the midst of tremendous national wealth have made reflective thinking unavoidable. A reflective thinking on the need to fashion out a concept of democracy that is in consonance with the nations culture and experience as an African nation. This is the point of focus of this paper.

Interestingly, Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa offered an inspirational example of using the ideal personality of the Bantu speaking people to conceptualize a concept of peace for Africa (Francis, 2007). In other words the purpose of this paper is to examine the concept of democracy as a political process of governance, discuss how the practice of democracy in Nigeria is devoid of the required African values hence, in-effective, and full of threats. The paper will also use the major characteristics of the ideal African personality to conceptualize democracy in a way that the elite and the non-elite, (majority population) will understand, appreciate and practice. Educational measures will also be suggested on how to consolidate and sustain democracy in Nigeria.

## **2. Methodology**

The method of philosophical analysis was used within the context of system building as a research pattern in philosophy of education. Adesanya (2012) defined philosophical analysis as the breaking down of issues and concepts into their constituent parts in order to understand the particular philosophical issues involved in the topic under consideration. Accordingly, philosophical analysis was used to answer the question, who is an African personality? System building in philosophy of education involves “speculating about a certain world view, man’s place in it, the type of values and conception of knowledge which this entail as well as educational proposals thought to be consistent with these” (Enoh, 2012, p. 58). In this wise, the paper will attempt to create an African-based system of democracy with an African world view and values coupled with relevant educational proposals to sustain it.

### **2.1 What is Democracy?**

Democracy as a concept is so contestable and so controversial that Arne, Christopher and Kvaløas far back as 1956 did a survey of definitions of democracy from Plato (427BC-358BC) to the middle of the 20th century and found 311 definitions. One is therefore faced with the problem of which definition to choose and reason for the choice. Despite this, however one can still take off from Greece, widely regarded as the birth place of western democracy. It is a common knowledge that democracy was derived from the Greek words — “demos” which means “the people” and “kratia” which means “to rule”. In the theory, this means a system of governance by the people for the people as opposed to rule by one dictator or a few individuals, oligarchy. Fayemi (2009, p. 104)

placed the debates “into a continuum that ranges from maximalist to minimalist”.

The minimalist like Adam Przeworski, John Poper and Russell Hardin among others see democracy as basically an electoral system that ensures regular elections, peaceful transfer of government and delegation of individual decision making power to winners of citizens' votes. The maximalist such as Robert Dahl and Larry Diamond on the other hand emphasizes citizens' freedom in all ramifications: freedom to pursue political views and positions; freedom from all forms of oppression and functional autonomy for all arms of government.

John Dewey, the pragmatist American philosopher offers another theoretical perspective to democracy with his contention that democracy should not be seen as an idea to be handed over hook – line – and – sinker by one generation to another generation, rather it should be seen as a way of life that can be worked out by a people given their values and realities (Dewey in Shaaba, 2013). This implies different values, different democracy (Tankin, 2005). In other words, divergence in democracy is natural and therefore expected because peoples values and realities cannot be the same in all nations. Dewey's theoretical process is very germane to this paper and quite in line with the admonition of Jackson (2012, p. 2) that “the struggle for African states will be how to successfully navigate democracy without losing African identities, values and goals”. African and indeed Nigeria in this case require a custom-fitted democracy that is conceptually anchored on Nigerian values as an African nation and practically realizable given the nation's experience and aspirations. This issue will be addressed from the perspective of African personality.

## **2.2 Who is an Ideal “African Personality”?**

Personality according to Nairne (2003, p. 410) is the “distinguishing pattern of thinking, feeling and behaviour that differentiates us from others and leads us to act consistently across situations”. Similarly Nevid (2009, p. 251) stated that “personality is the relatively stable set of psychological characteristics and behaviour patterns that make individuals unique and account for the consistency of their behaviour over time”. Personality therefore, constitute a basis by which individuals can be differentiated and at the same time possibly predicted in their day to day interaction with the people. Personality traits and disposition make people respond in certain ways to issues and ideas; it defines people and make us know who they are, why they are what they are and what is their mindset on issues?

Thus, in Nigeria, there can be, among others, Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Ijaw, Tiv, Kanuri and Nupe personalities among others. Each of these can be differentiated on the basis of their language and mindset in practicing ideas, reacting to issues and relating to people consistently. The common features among the various language groups can be shifted to constitute the Nigerian personality as different from the English man, the Chinese, the French and the Japanese. In a similar but wider manner, the common characteristic values among the African countries can be used to define the African personality who is unique in his own way and different from the European personality, the Asian personality and the American personality. In the case of Africa, the characteristic values that constitute African personality can be deduced from African communalism. In specific terms, the communal values considered relevant for the purpose of this paper are collective belonging, family ties and family spirit and openness and availability to others (Wafula, 2003; Nyasani, ...).

The first communal characteristic to be considered is collective belonging, Mbiti, a famous African philosopher that is passionate about African perspectives to philosophical issues, the African as an individual can only exist as part of the community in traditional life. This implies that he owes his existence to other people who are either living or dead. The import of the above is that the individual. Perception of reality “which includes such

things as his rights and privileges and duties are determined from the point of view of the community” (Oyeshile, 2006, p. 109). This is why whatever happens to an individual in terms of good or evil is seen as either an asset or a burden to the corporate whole. The world view in thinking and behaviour of the African personality is in consonance with the African communal dictum succinctly worded by Mbiti (1981, p. 107), thus: “I am because we are and since we are, therefore, I am.” Just as his burden is not his own alone, his achievement is not his own exclusively, others have a right to it.

Thus, the above world view of the ideal African personality, who is a Nigerian in this case emphasizes “we” before “I” and it is contrary to the world view of the selfish or greedy African whose focus is on “I” before “we”. The selfish or greedy person seems to be guided by the dictum, “we are because I am and since I am, therefore, we are”. He defined peoples happiness and achievement by his own. The mindset of the ideal African personality can be characterized as a collective living mindset against individual living mindset of the selfish, greedy person. Suffice to state that collective living is a responsibility on an African not a volition and the benefit being derived by others from his achievement is not a privilege but a right.

In comparing Africa with the western world, Shaaba (2010) identified collectivism and individualism as part of the basic points of difference. While the western world gives primary attention to individualism the African emphasizes concern for others as the primary thing. Africa, according to Ayittey (2010) could have built on this difference to develop their unique democracy instead of abandoning it as a result of modernization.

The second communal characteristic of an ideal African personality is family tie/family spirit which make the African child to appreciate, from birth that he is surrounded by a gradually expanding family: nuclear family; extended family; compound family; ward family and village or town family. He appreciates the family ties as asset not liabilities. No matter how elderly, pious, wealthy and powerful a person is, he will be considered irresponsible and therefore nominal if he consistently fail in his duties to his family and community. According to Henri Manrie in Inroegbo (1996, p. 159) “relation is constituent of the human person. Without it, the human person is isolated, and falls into nothingness”.

The third communal characteristic is openness and availability to others. These qualities enhance responsibility and public spiritedness in Africans, thus discouraging selfishness, greed and exploitation. In the course of being open and available, people may enjoy one benefit or the other from him; such benefits are not privileges but rights of the beneficiary. In the same vein, his sadness is shared by others as duties not as volitions.

Consistent behaviour of the citizens in accordance to African personality characteristics of family ties and family spirit, collective belonging and openness and availability to others, the culture of love, care, compassion, patience, kindness, sincerity of purpose, and integrity and honour are generated in the entire society. Such society becomes an ideal African society where the rich regards his wealth as a source of wealth and happiness for all, where, the poor and the sad have people helping them to share the sadness and minimize the impact of poverty. It is a society where everybody is cooperating to live a good life.

The ideal African personality based on the above description can be diagrammatically represented as follows:

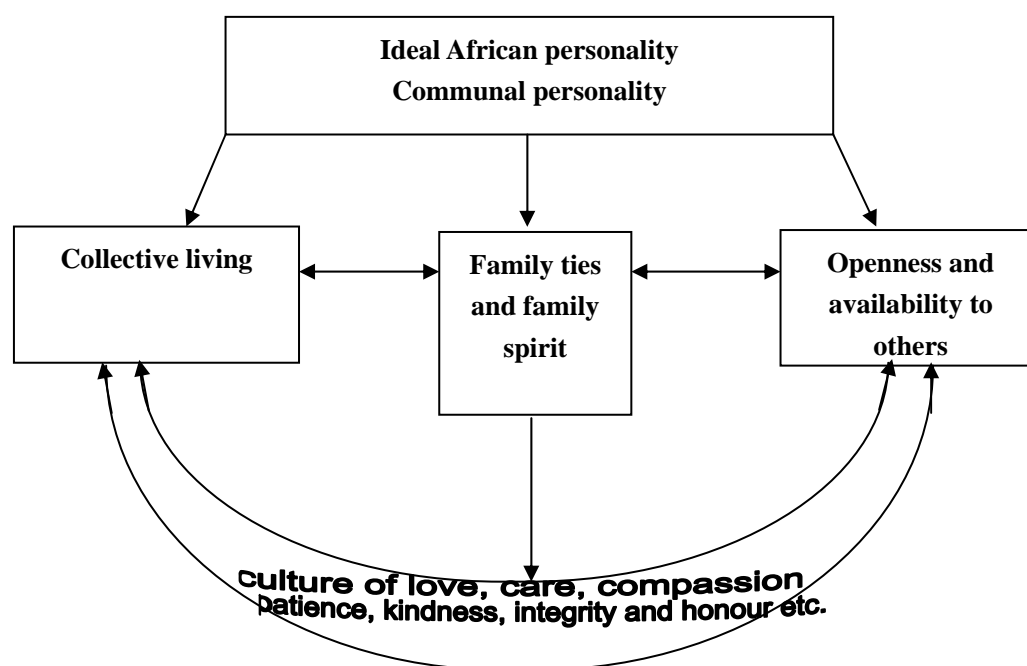


Figure 1 African Personality Outlook (APO)

The ideal African personality (the communal personality) is qualified by various names in different Africa/Nigerian communities (Shaaba, 2013). The Bantu speaking people of South Africa call him “Ubuntu” In Nigeria: The Hausa people call him “Nagari” or “MutumunKirki”; the Yoruba people call him “Omoluabi”; while the Igbo people call him “EzigboMmadu”. In Nupe land of Nigeria, he is called “Zaguru”. Are the characteristic qualities of an ideal African personality being reflected in democratic practices in Nigeria all these years, especially in terms of enhancing the required development of the country to people’s satisfaction? This question will now be answered.

### 3. Nigeria Democracy in African Personality Terms

Democracy is not an end in itself, but a means to an end and part of that end is the development of countries and development of the people. According to Sanda (1992) development is the multi-dimensional positive change which affect the majority and which are in the social, economic, political and cultural spheres of the societal life. Development should not be limited to few individuals but must be practically seen to affect majority of the population — this is the minimum criteria for regarding a country as developed. In fact, all liberal democratic values of justice, freedom, equality, accountability, free and fair elections etc. are supposed to be converted to development of the people by way of providing them with functional education, good roads, good communication, good health system and regular power supply. Also the people are expected to enjoy sustainable means of employment and proper security and an overall good economy that goes beyond paper indices and can be practically seen in the life of the people. When such developments take place, the leaders can be said to operate with the mindset of African personality.

From the positive side, Nigeria is presently one of the Africa’s biggest success stories in information and communication technology including availability of phone facilities for the masses (Toure, 2010). There is relative improvement in human rights record of the country since 1999 and the international financial reputation has

significantly improved (USAID, 2006). Also regular election that led to relatively, peaceful transfer of power can be said to have taken place at various times.

But from the negative angle, regular power supply has become a mirage, pot holes are common sights on Nigerian roads while the nation's health system was rated 18th out 191 countries (Ogbonaya, 2009). More than 50% of Nigerians have no access to portable water (Omoniyi, 2011) which was confirmed implicitly by the former President Jonathan himself (Umejei, 2011). The Nigerian educational system is so bad in terms of infrastructure that the best Nigerian university in 2012 was ranked 5, 484 in the world (transparency.com). Unemployment in Nigeria is alarmingly high (Ilalafira.com), while poverty continues to increase (National Bureau' for Statistics, 2012). Nigeria was ranked number fourteen in the failed states index, just below.... Afghanistan, Somalia and Iraq" (Achebe, 2012, p. 250). Furthermore, out of despair, Achebe (2012, p. 149) reintegrated that "corruption in Nigeria has passed the alarming and entered the fatal stage, and Nigeria will die if we continue to pretend that she is only slightly indisposed".

The above negative and positive results of democracy in Nigeria are not by any means exhaustive of what can be found on the ground. But the point being made here is that Nigeria since 1999 has recorded more negative results of democracy than positive results, especially if one considers the impact democracy is supposed to have made on the majority of the population and the entire masses.

Unfortunately in the midst of negative records, Nigerian Ministers are paid higher than Ministers in United States and United Kingdom, yet Nigeria is not as rich as these countries (Daily Trust, 2013). To further compound the problem, the former President, Goodluck Jonathan had to disagree with the World Bank which listed Nigeria as one of the five poorest countries of the world. The Presidents' disagreement was based on his contention that Nigeria falls among the first ten nations with the highest number of private jet owners in the world, hence Nigeria cannot be said to be poor. The only problem of Nigeria, according to him is that of redistribution of wealth (Daily Trust, 2014), forgetting that material poverty and redistribution of wealth can be likened to two sides of the same coin.

An overview of the above negative records of democratic dispensation, shows that Nigeria elected and appointed leaders were not governing Nigeria with the mindset of the ideal African personality. Their leaderships: have been devoid of family ties and family spirit with the masses; concentrated on "I" — living at the expense of "We" (collective) living" with the electorate. Also, the leaderships were neither open, nor available to the people, hence do not seem to fully appreciate the people's suffering or must have trivialized the suffering. The leaders can also be said to have governed by lying. This is why they have been characterized as leaders who "see no dishonor in making or breaking a pact" (Egbunike, 2010, p. 1). Because of the endemic nature of politics by lying, Nigeria is being described as a landscape "littered with unkept and broken promises..... as a result, most Nigerians have developed a cynical attitude that borders on distrust of the establishment" (Egbunike, 2010, p. 2). In Africa personality terms, therefore, the situation above can be characterized as one where the positive dividends of democracy are far less than the negative dividends. Nigeria is therefore a nation where the people's woes and sadness over democracy is endemic and unfortunate because most of the leaders across all levels of democratic governance ruled without genuine love for the people, ruled selfishly, ruled without compassion, integrity and honour. Day to day governance and leadership jettisoned national family ties and family spirit, replacing them with strictly nuclear family selfishness; collective living was replaced with selfish living. Also openness and availability by the leaders to the citizen were replaced with disconnection with the people. It is therefore not surprising that the ruling party, PDP lost convincingly to the opposition party in 2015 elections.

Generally speaking, therefore, Nigerian leaders across the three tiers of government — federal, state and local cannot be described as “Zaguru” leaders neither can they be called “Nagari” leaders nor qualified as “Omoluabi” or EzigboMmadu. This is why it is important to conceptualize a new democracy that integrates liberal democracy with African personality values within the context Nigeria’s aspiration as an African nation.

#### **4. A Concept of Democracy for Nigeria**

It will be recalled that liberal democratic values have earlier been identified to include freedom, equality, justice, rule of law, accountability, free and fair periodic elections and peoples participation e.t.c. Also, the major characteristic value of the ideal African personality have been listed to include the mindsets of collective living, family ties and family spirit and openness and availability to others. The nation’s aspirations from the philosophical point of view can be seen in section 1, subsection 2 of the National Policy on Education. The policy states the overall philosophy of Nigeria as: (a) live in unity and harmony as one indivisible, indissoluble, democratic and sovereign nation founded on the principles of freedom, equality and justice; and (b) promote inter-African solidarity and world peace through understanding” (FGN, p. 1)

It can be seen that the liberal democratic values are conceptually related to the national philosophy (Nigerians aspiration) given the fact they both emphasize the values of freedom, equality and justice with the intent to build a united democratic country. In a similar manner, the national philosophy is related to communal personality, the ideal African Personality because while the philosophy promotes inter-African solidarity through understanding, the communal personality is anchored on Africa values as ingrained in the characteristics of the ideal African personality. To complete the tripartite relationship, it can also be stated that communal personality is related to liberal democracy because the two are democracies that emphasize the importance of people as unavoidable participants and ultimate beneficiaries. The tripartite relationship between the three groups of values can be used to conceptualize a concept of democracy for Nigeria which can be called Communal Democracy.

By way of definition, Communal Democracy is a socio-political system that is inclusive of the liberal democratic values of freedom, equality, justice, rule of law, accountability, periodic elections etc. but operated with the mindset of African communalism: family ties and family spirit with Nigerians, collective living to take care of peoples welfare; and openness and availability to Nigerians with the intent to listen to them, love them and link up with them. The hallmark of this concept is the mindset required for successful implementation; the mindset differentiates it from other democracies and makes it unique to Nigeria as an African country.

By mindset, one is referring to a mental attitude, a fixed state of mind that predetermine a person’s response to an issue/s and interpretation of situations ([www.thefreedictionary.com](http://www.thefreedictionary.com)), The success of democracy can be said to depend a lot on the mindset with which it is practiced. In fact every theory of democracy can be said to be neutral in terms of whether it is good or bad, rather it is the mindset of practitioners that may largely determine the success or otherwise. Mind defines the beingness of man. This is why Rene Descartes define man by his mind, stating that he did not admit in himself anything but mind (Oyeshile, 2008). George Berkeley in a related manner said “neither our thoughts, nor passion nor ideas formed by the imagination exist without the mind” (Oyeshile 2008, p. 141). In fact, a man is what he thinks and a man’s mindset largely dictates what he does with anything and how he does it. Specification of mindset as an integral part of communal democracy is therefore desirable and provides the practitioners with needed mental empowerment and operational value.

## 5. Justification behind Communal Democracy

Democracy as a political system is result oriented and expected to bring about all-round development of the people, but this has not been the case in Nigeria as stated earlier. The poor results have been largely due to greedy and selfish mindsets of the leaders; mindsets that promote the negative dictum of “we are because I am and since I am, therefore we are”. Communal democracy is seen by this paper as a possible type of democracy that can address the negative mindsets that has been fueling corruption to destroy democracy in Nigeria and indeed in many African countries.

Another justification for the communal democracy is the fact that Nigeria is a pluralistic country with divergent, and quit often sentimental and antagonistic views. It is a pluralistic country where the issue of equality, justice, power and resource distribution are yet to be resolved in any significant way that can make the people trust one another. The nation therefore, needs a democracy that can appreciate our differences and yet bind us together in a free, cooperative manner. Communal democracy is proposed in this paper has the potential of binding Nigerians together to love, respect and trust one another in a mutually reciprocating manner, everything being equal.

Communal democracy will also help to minimize the hate speeches that often become part of electioneering campaigns. Politicians hopefully will see other Nigerians as members of a large national family: Nigerian family that exist by birth or by residence in regions, states, and localities; members of the same Nigerian family that exist in ruling and opposition parties; Nigeria family members that are free choosing people who should play politics for the ultimate purpose of building a united virile country in accordance to the overall philosophy of the nation.

It is therefore hoped that a new mindset by all stakeholders in the democratic governance will go a long way to bring about the much needed institutionalization of democratic ethos that will guarantee sustainable development. For the problem of Nigeria democracy all along has largely been with the operators of the system; the mindset of operators not with the system perse.

At this juncture, it is important to point out that a number of constraints may emerge to prevent communal democracy from taking smooth shape. These may include high level poverty, endemic corruption, greed and selfishness, especially among leaders, for Nigerians are good followers if the leadership is good. It is therefore, imperative that leaders at all levels of governance should make it a point of duty to lead by example on the basis of zero tolerance for corruption and all its associates. Such good leadership can go a long way to meaningfully reduce poverty and make the citizens become more patriotic to support governments programme of establishing sustainable communal democratic ethos.

### 5.1 Electoral Implications

The criteria for choosing and electing political representative should do away with undesirable criteria like godfatherism and money bag politics e.t.c Rather emphasis should be on the extent to which the candidate possess the African personality characteristic; communal democratic qualities; the Zaguru features; the habit of Nagari personality; the behaviour of Omoluabi and the attitude of EzigboMmadu. A change of criteria as stated above will go a long way to make the common mans participation more meaningful because it is culture based. Also, when the political representative hold their various positions and carry out their responsibilities practically on the basis of “Zaguru – Nagari – Omoluabi – EzigboMmadu” mindset, corruption, greed, selfishness, lying and all forms of vices that are currently endemic in Nigerian democracy will minimize to the barest minimum. In fact, it



can be predicted that if the President of Nigeria, the state governors, the local government chairmen, and the law makers across the nation make the tenets of communal democracy their operational values, Nigeria will become the real giant of Africa and a real global model of custom fitted African democracy.

## 5.2 Educational Implications

No socio-political system will stand the test of time, if there is no appropriate educational system to sustain it. Since there is diversity of democracy, a diversity should be expected in democratic education. In other words, different democracies give rise to different but possibly related democratic education. In view of the above, a number of educational measures which are not exhaustive by any means, have been suggested to enhance communal democracy.

Adult education is a veritable tool for consolidating democracy. Adeniyi and Abdulrasheed in Onyenemezu and Amazu (2012, p. 12) noted that “anybody selected as a leader..... must be faithful to the electorates. He must see to the welfare of his subjects, protect their rights and guarantee the safety of their lives and property”. Adult education should therefore pursue political educations that changes the mindset of politician; changes that emphasize collective living with Nigerians, family ties and family spirit with Nigerians and openness and availability to Nigerians. Every election should be seen as a process of initiating and sustaining family tie relationship between the elected and the electorate; a relationship that makes it incumbent on the elected to fulfill his promise to the people; a relationship that makes it a right of the electorate (the people) to enjoy good governance and good leadership. Anything short of this is anti communal democracy. The National Orientation Agency (NOA) should propagate the features of communal democracy across all levels of the society so as to change the orientation of Nigerian accordingly, especially politicians.

Implications for formal (schooling) education includes the fact that the Philosophy and Goals of Education in Nigeria as contained in section 1 of the National Policy on Education should be amended to reflect communal democracy as Nigeria’s brand of democracy and should be defined stating the mindset required for implementation. This will be in line with Frankenna’s model which requires that for a philosophy of education to be philosophical, “it must provide a list of excellences to be produced by the educational process and these should be defined.” (Shaaba, 2003, p. 53).

Classroom teaching at all levels of Nigerian education should include deliberate integration of lessons with character training on communal democracy. All lessons in all disciplines have the potential of being used to teach good behaviours (affective domain) as long as the teacher sees himself as an educator that is creative. For example students can be given assignments and tutorial questions that involved sharing knowledge and collective presentation with the intention of inculcating the behaviour of family ties and family spirit, openness and availability to others and the idea of collective living.

Family education is another means by which communal democratic values can be inculcated in children right from root. Parents are the first teachers of every child and by extension families are the first agents of education in every nation. In teaching family ties and family spirit, parents should not only relate it to nuclear and extended families, but should also relate it to town, local government, state and national families. Parents should make children see themselves as members of Nigerian families who are born and breed in various sub Nigerian families; nuclear, extended, town, local and state families.

## 6. Conclusion

From the foregoing, it can be stated that democracy should not be conducted with the view that there is only one model of democracy. Rather, there are various models and there will continue to be various models. The models could be outcomes of fine tuning of existing models, complete departure from existing models or integration of existing model with relevant features of people's realities. For example, Britain integrated her monarchy with modern democracy. Accordingly, this paper after highlighting the challenges and problems of failure connected with Nigerian democracy, it proposed communal democracy which is an integration of liberal democracy and the characteristics features of African personality within the context of Nigeria aspiration as an African country. This is with the hope that the mindset required of communal democracy will go a long way to change the present attitude of corruption, selfishness and greed that are endemic in the present democratic dispensation. In order to consolidate the democracy, a number of electoral and educational implications were highlighted.

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