

**REPOSITIONING SOCIAL STUDIES FOR DEMOCRATIC CHALLENGES IN
NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

Social studies is a veritable instrument for attainment of national integration and a true democracy in Nigeria. The emphasis of social studies is on all round development of the individual and the society. In this paper, issues bordering on social studies and democratic challenges. Specifically, it dwelt on the challenges of social studies in attaining a true democracy in Nigeria.

Introduction

In a democratic society, the education system must perform a positive and dynamic role in perpetuating and improving that society. The school has an obligation to provide a curriculum designed to develop effective living in the society. Such a curriculum should equip the learners with skills, understanding, attitudes, habits and appreciation that will contribute to the broad goal. It is for this complementary role that social studies, as a school discipline was introduced in the curriculum. In other words, social studies have its primary function, the treatment of the entire range of man's activities which include: self-realization, human relationship, economic efficiency and civic responsibly.

In view of the above rule, in 1975, social studies was introduced to replace History Geography, Civics and Government in Nigeria primary schools. At present, social studies, is taught at all levels of the Nigerian educational system.

Social studies are one of the core subjects in the curriculum of junior secondary schools in Nigeria. Its compulsory nature also drives from, its perceived potentials of enhancing societal stability and bring about desirable changes in the behaviour of the young students for whom the subject is meant (Mkpa, 1995).

Thus, its contents are of immense value in guaranteeing the production of disciplined generation of school leavers, which is envisioned in the Nigerian National Policy on Education. Highlighting importance of social studies and its application to studies and its application to national development and attainment of democracy, Mezieobi (1995) Maintained that social studies education holds great potentials contributing substantially to the production of people with the desired behavioural and attitudinal dispositions to push Nigeria in the direction of achieving national integration. Udosen (2001) believes that if well taught social studies can play an Important role in influencing the behaviour, attitudes, interests and feelings or values of the young and yet unborn generations of the society.

As a result of the significance attached to social studies education for the realization of the national objectives vis-a-visa democracy, social studies is thus a vehicle for the inculcation of Nigerian Education, Social studies as a core subject at all levels of the education system should be seen as possessing the potentials to achieve the five cardinal goals of education in Nigeria. (Ogunsanya 1984), opined that the attention given to the development of desirable attitudes and values in social studies education through the careful design deliberate and systematic teaching of these values makes the subject unique. He said further that its uniqueness in this case places it in the best position to contribute much than all other subjects added together to the achievement of an important national aim of education which according to him include "the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and Nigerian society. Therefore, posits that in ensuring a true democracy in Nigeria polity, the social studies education has to be reappraised.

Conceptual Framework

Social studies is defined as the study of the interactions, interrelationships and interdependencies between man and his fellow man and between man and his social, physical and chemical environment.

Ajiboye (1999) simply puts it as the study of man in his society. Social studies is not the study of man alone or the study of the society exclusively rather it studies man at home, at work at worship, in politics, in the village, in nation and everywhere man engages in his busy programme of living (Bart and Dubey, 1998) says that social studies is an integration of many subjects of the social sciences, arts and sciences. Mezieobi (1992) sees social studies as citizenship education.

Mezieobi et al (2008) see social studies as an integrative field of study which probe man's symbiotic relationships with his environments endows man with the reflective or contemplative capacities intellectual, affective, social and work skills, to enable him understand his world and its problems and rationally solve or cope with them for effective living in the society. Democracy

On the other hand of a system of government in which all the people of the country has full right as citizens of such country. they all have equal right and are given fair treatment.

Philosophy of Social Studies Education

Social studies education is founded on the philosophy of life-long education that emphasizes the acquisition of positive social, economic and political values, attitudes and skills for life utilization of human and natural resources for personal and societal improvement and progress. The philosophy of social studies education is in agreement with the nature of the Nigerian society.

The reflection, inquiring approach by social studies is built on the assumption that the society creates citizens who can identify related problems, analyze them and take rational decisions. In other words, social studies education aligns national values and skills with national development programmes. This is considered important because social economic and political programmes are expected to be the product of the country's social economic and political values and traditions.

Benefits of Social Studies Educations

The national policy on Education (2004) adopted social studies as a core subject in primary and secondary schools in Nigeria, because of its quality in reframing the attitude, behaviour positive conducts in society. The following are the benefits of social studies.

- It helps to create awareness and an understanding of our evolving social and physical environment as a whole in its natural, man made cultural and spiritual resources for national development.
- It helps to develop a capacity to learn and to acquire certain skills, including not only those of listening, speaking, reading, writing and of calculation but also those skills of hand and head together with nose of

observation, analysis and inference which are essential to the forming of sound socio-economic and political judgment.

- It helps to ensure the acquisition of that relevant body of knowledge and inform with essential prerequisite to personal development as well as to a positive personal contribution to the betterment of mankind.
- It helps to develop a systematic appreciation of the diversity and interdependence of all members of the local community and the wider national community.
- It helps to develop in students positive attitudes of togetherness, comradeship towards a healthy nation, the inculcation of appropriate values of honesty integrity, handwork, fairness and justice at work and play as one's contribution to development of the nation.

In considering social studies as vehicle for the inculcation of the philosophy of Nigerian education, the following objectives are identified by Dubey, et al 1980:

- i. The development of good citizenship, the upliftment of moral character and to promote social understanding in the Nigerian society.
- ii. The promotion of national unity and economic development.
- iii. Preparing students for the world of the work and understanding of everyday problems that they may face as adults.
- iv. The development of critical thinking, problem solving and decision-making for survival and progress of the nation.

The objectives of social studies education in Nigerian have been further categorized three broad groups, by Mansarany (1991):

1. *Knowledge*: This means understanding the evolving social physical environment, acquiring basic facts and information about our environment.
2. *Skills*: acquiring such basic skills as listening, speaking reading, writing, skills observation, data-collection, analysis and inference, which are essential to formation of, sound judgment.

3. *Attitudes and values:* Development of positive attitudes of togetherness, comradeship and cooperation the inculcation of values of honesty, handwork, fairness.

A critical analytical consideration of these three groupings go to justify the strength possessed by the social studies in human development and attainment of true democracy no other subject on the school curriculum has the potentiality of bringing about a high quality character, the understanding, tolerance, appreciation of various cultures and subcultures component groups in Nigeria as social studies. According to Rose and Genevois (2006) a high quality education will always reflect the dynamic nature of culture and language, the value of individual in relation to the larger context and the importance of living in a way that promotes equality in the present and foster sustainable feature.

Social Studies Objectives and the Nigerian National Objective

For better appreciation of the relevance of social studies education to the attainment of true democracy it is necessary to highlight the social studies objectives and the Nigerian national objectives.

Nigeria has a set of national objectives which the country is struggling to achieve as a nation. These objectives are meant to determine, influence and guide Nigerian national policies, plans, constitute the strategies which constitute the measures through which the objectives can be realized. The objectives as expressed in National Policy on Education (2004:6) are the building of:

- i. a free and democratic society
- ii. a just and egalitarian society
- iii. a united, strong and self-reliant nation
- iv. a great and dynamic economy
- v. a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens.

Nigeria's philosophy of education as contained in the National Policy on Education (2004) is based on the integration of the individual into a sound and effective citizen and equal educational opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the primary and secondary levels. This educational objective is also meant to influence, determine or guide Nigerian educational policies, plans, decisions and strategies.

A critical understanding of the objectives shows that social studies can be a vehicle to achieve the under listed national goals on education. Free and democratic society: Social studies ensures the acquisition of that relevant body of knowledge and information with essential pre-requisite to personal development as well as to a positive personal contribution to the betterment of mankind, thus instilling and inculcating a critical and questioning attitude to the mind and by so doing giving it more mature outlook to life. In this way it assists to produce individuals with relevant knowledge well-informed in societal matters equipped with positive initiatives who can have a say in the society in which they live.

A just and egalitarian society it is an objective of social studies to develop in the students positive attitudes of oneness, comradeship and cooperation towards a health national the inculcation of appropriate values of honesty, integrity, hard work, fairness and justice (at work and play) as one's contribution to the development of the nation. Social studies helps to inculcate certain indispensable virtues, which helps the individuals have the right attitude to life. Such vital virtues are tolerance, courage, self-discipline, appreciation, respect, patriotism, endurance, sympathy, self-reliance, honesty, obedience, kindness and industrials.

- *A united, strong and self-reliance nation:* Social studies intent to develop a capacity to learn and to acquire certain skills, inculcating not only those of listening, speaking, reading writing and of calculation but also those skills of hand together with those of observation, analysis and inference which are essential to the forming a sound socio-economic and political judgment. With the objective, social studies will be able to produce

individuals who acquire skills and attitudes which would fit them into the world of employment through which they can make meaningful contributions to the development of themselves and the society at large.

- *A great and dynamic economy:* Social studies helps to create awareness and an understanding of our evolving social and physical environment as a whole in its natural man made cultural and spiritual resources for national development. Social studies has the process of growth, exposing of knowledge, a network of facts which also is subjected modification, acceptance or rejection thereby contributing towards the achievement of a great and dynamic economy.
- *A land full of bright opportunities for all citizens:* Social studies help to develop a systematic appreciation of the diversity and interdependence of all members of the local community and the wider national and international community.

Problems of social studies education in Nigeria

Having seen the lofty objectives of social studies education and the position it occupies as a core subject in the primary and junior secondary schools, a critical look at Nigerian democracy today will reveal that social studies is faced with a lot of challenges ranging from her incompetency to corruption, ethnicity, communal or ethnic crisis, religious intolerance and terrorism which is the order of the day, has made impossible to attain objectives and ensuring free and democratic society.

Teachers' incompetency is the principal factor in the inappropriate implementation of the social studies curriculum at all levels of the educational system. The domination by generalist social studies teachers in Nigeria social studies classroom is obvious indication that social studies implementation is bound to be malfunctioned. Mezicobi (1990 Pp.44) pointed out that the malfunctioning of the social studies curriculum in Nigeria is attributed largely to the inappropriate utilization of teaching methods and techniques relevant to the effective teaching and learning of social studies. He further stressed that

these method logical malfunctioning in social studies education are manifested in the following.

Teachers' approaches to social studies teaching are largely pedagogical emphasis on cognitive achievement to the utter neglect of the affective and psychomotor domains. Teaching force in social studies is dominated by personnel trained in history, geography, economics, political science, these caliber of social studies "teachers" teach social studies in the light of a single subject approach in place of integrative approach.

Obebe (2005) noted that teachers still teach history and geography interchangeably in their social studies classrooms.

Social studies as a living subject

Social studies as the know deals with the realities of life. Society is dynamic by this it implies that the society is constantly changing with time. The dynamic nature of social studies is also major challenge facing the subject because; most of the social studies textbooks have become obsolete. Current events such as amenity, terrorism, corruption, ethnicity etc are not d by social studies another, striking challenge is that social studies education is taught only at the basic education level (primary and junior secondary school) and teachers training colleges and the tertiary institutions thus creating a gap at the senior secondary school level and this has given wrong notion that social studies is an introductory subject to social sciences at the senior secondary school level.

Repositioning Social Studies Education for Democratic Challenges in Nigeria

To attain a true democracy in Nigerian polity through social studies education, the following should be looked into;

The teaching of social studies in Nigerian educational institutions should be entrusted in the hands of professionally trained social studies educationists

who would employ the suitable methods, strategies techniques and resources relevance to effective implementation of social studies education.

The current teachers of social studies in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions who, by training do not have requisite credentials in social studies education should be subjected to a mandatory diploma programme in social studies education through part time or sandwich basis.

The training programme in social studies should be subjected to periodic evaluation to attune it to the changing societal demands and modern trends and realities. The teaching of social studies should be child centred and activity packed. Students should be well exposed to the new innovative teaching methods such as problem solving, inquiring, discovery etc.

Social studies teachers should be encouraged to write books. More so, social studies teachers must be conversant with goals of social studies. A topic like ethnicity should be taught in a manner that it will eradicate ethnocentric behavior, hatred and biases that can arise from multiethnic nation like Nigeria. This should be the task of social studies teacher to achieve peaceful co-existence and true democracy in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Education is a powerful instrument in the advancement of individual and national goal. Thus development in Nigeria must use education as a tool. The overall objective of social studies education is to produce responsible citizens who will contribute positively to the national building and development. That is, why in this paper emphasis is placed on re-positioning social studies education for democratic challenges in Nigeria National philosophy, then it is compelling that social studies education should be strengthened as a catalyst for attainment of a true democracy in Nigeria.

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