

# THE ROLE OF SOCIAL STUDIES IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT



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## **Abstract**

*This paper principally examined the role of Social Studies in national development. Specifically, it looked at the nature and concept of Social Studies, the growth and development of Social Studies and the concept of national development. It further dwelt on the role of Social Studies in achieving national development in Nigeria which is identified as good citizenship, development of national consciousness, creation of awareness, knowledge of significant development in human societies, development of critical thought, fostering of national unity and moral education and development. Social Studies as a discipline strive to fill national objectives thereby leading to national development. This brings the linkage between Social Studies and national development.*

Social Studies as an integrated discipline in the educational system of Nigeria, is a study which emphasises the process of identifying and solving problems for the survival of man which also includes the ability to maintain peace, an orderly, decent and progressive life (NTI 2000). Thus, the importance of Social Studies as an instrument for national development cannot be over emphasised. Social Studies as a discipline study people in their environment in order to understand their problems and to find solution to these problems. It is concerned with human relationship, integration, socio-economic development as well as inculcating the right societal values in the individual. It is a societal based discipline that is directed towards solving problems of the society that is why it is tailored to meet the needs of the Nigerian society. The essence of Social Studies is to inspire inquiry spirit in the learner for technological, economic, social, physical and cultural transformation of the society.

Social Studies was introduced in the Nigerian School Curriculum as part of the instrument for achieving national development (National Policy on Education (NPE) 2004). This was what informed its designation as part of the core curriculum at different levels of education in Nigeria. Social Studies curriculum development agencies such as the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) and experts identified the goals or purposes of the subject in the school curriculum. The goals of Social Studies include citizenship education, reflective inquiry and social science education, (Dubey and Barth, 1980; Olawepo, 1994, Osakwe and Itedjere, 1993 and Meizeobi, 2005) among others. These broadly stated goals must be recognized as important as well as attainable by the Nigerian populace if the intentions or purposes must be realized and the investment of effort is to be considered worthwhile (Obro, 2007). The correct conception, investment of efforts and ultimate realization of the purposes of the Social Studies will facilitate the realization of the overall aims of national development (Nwalado, 2007).

### **The Nature and Concept of Social Studies**

At the birth of Social Studies, the committee for the development of the programme viewed the subject as that area of curriculum that will cultivate good citizenship and national development. Various writers such as Osakwe and Itedjere, (1993), Mezieobi and Domike (1996) Omosehin, (1996) had viewed Social Studies in various ways. Osakwe and Itedjere (1993) described Social Studies as a study of how man influences and is in turn influenced by his physical, social, political, religious, economic, psychological, cultural, scientific and technological environments. This view of Social Studies has its foundation in society and generally issue oriented. It places emphasis on the processes and outcome of man's interaction with his different kinds of environment. Mezieobi and Domike (1996) described Social Studies as a study of how man influences and is in turn influenced by his physical, and social, political, religious, economic, psychological, cultural, scientific and technological environment. They saw Social Studies as the process and outcomes of man's interaction with his different kinds of environments. They saw Social Studies as the process and outcomes of man's interaction with his different kinds of environments. For Omosehin (1996) Social Studies is the study of man within his environments-physical, social, economic, psychological, religious, political, cultural, scientific and technological. She buttressed further that, it is a distinct integrated single subject that attempt to study virtually the totality of man's existence on earth purposely to encourage learners to acquire knowledge, skills and values needed for understanding and coping with man in the course of survival. The impression being created (Osakwe and Itedjere, 1993, Mezieobi and Domike, 1996 and Omosehin, 1996) is that Social Studies do not lead itself to easy definition. The common definition is that it is the study of people in their environment and how people influence and are influenced by the social and physical environment.

National Teacher Institute (NTI) (2000) defined Social Studies as the process of education, which emphasizes the relationships human beings have with their physical and social worlds. Alberta (2005) viewed Social studies as a school subject that assists students to acquire (the) basic knowledge, skills and positive attitudes needed to be responsible citizens and contributing members of society.

Mafuyae (1992) observed that Social Studies touch the very heart of our society. It deals with the important problems of national unity and economic development of international understanding and ethnic tolerance. He further opined that Social Studies can play a major role in the successful implementation of our political goals, provide students with the skills they will require for articulate citizenship, for participation in political democracy, for political literacy and for social responsibility.

Social Studies could be regarded as a subject concerned primarily with the study of people, their environment, and the society in which they live and the resultant interaction of these three elements. To National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) (2005), Social studies is the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. The primary purpose of the Social Studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world. This assertion of NCSS has a very high sociological background. There is no clear distinction made between the roles of the social sciences and humanities and Social Studies programme. When taught well, Social Studies engages students in the difficult process of confronting ethical and value-based dilemmas, and encourages students to speculate, think critically, and make personal and civic decisions based on information from multiple perspectives.

A wider concept of Social Studies was offered by Shiundu and Ali (2000), when they asserted that Social Studies is that part of the school activity that have to do with the teaching and learning of those social significant problems, questions and topics believed to be relevant to the well-being of our society. Oniyama (1995) was of the view that Social Studies helps in the understanding of the failures and successes of man in his attempt to solve problems arising from his environment, and the relationship with his fellow man.

### **The Growth and Development of Social Studies**

The introduction of Social Studies as a school subject was resisted by subject specialist particularly history and geography teachers (Osakwe and Itedjere, 1993). They were worried about the spread of Social Studies and were highly critical of the claim of Social Studies to represent a special synthesis. Geographers and historians considered their subjects to be the integration subjects. By the middle of 1950s, Social Studies was fast losing ground. (Osakwe and Itedjere, 1993).

Many schools had returned to traditional curriculum such as history geography and economics. To revive interest in Social Studies the British government's report on education demanded that school curriculum should be relevant to an industrialized and changing society. In 1926, the Ministry of Education in Britain published a pamphlet devoted to the question of education for citizenship. The general view of the publication was on teaching and learning needed in schools to produce good citizens. The study of man in society became a focal point, which should permeate the subject matter of all organized studies. History and geography teachers in particular, were advised to make their subjects socially relevant. This latest pressure mounted by the British government brought about what was known as the new Social Studies. By the early 1960s, an increasing number of teachers and educationist had firmly decided that the inclusion of some element of the social sciences in Social Studies courses could be necessary. It would help to avoid pit falls of earlier Social Studies courses and at the same time, provide rationale and structure for the course.

According to Lawton and Dufour (1973), one of the pioneering courses in the first half of the 1960's was at Kidbrooke Comprehensive Schools London where the social sciences was used to teach the pupils about society. The department comprised of an economist, an anthropologist, a sociologist and a few general subject teachers. The educationists involved in the training of teachers at the university of London institute of education had put forward suggestions to develop the teaching of Social Studies. They suggested that Social Studies content should be selected from the social sciences with subjects such as sociology and anthropology as the core. Social Studies was then seen as the social sciences adopted and simplified for pedagogical purposes.

From beginning in the 1960s, Social Studies was introduced in several African countries under the auspices of the African Social Studies Programme (ASSP) that was launched at a conference in Mombassa in 1968. The objectives of African Social Studies were similar to those of American Social Studies which involves appreciation of home and heritage, understanding of interactions between people and their cultural, social and physical environments, development of citizenship and use of a multi-media approach with active participation of students (Nziramasanga 1989). The emphasis was on using local contexts and examples and on the teaching of knowledge, skills and attitudes in integrated Afro-centric courses that often replaced the traditional colonial Euro-centric curricula in history, geography and civics. Member nations sought to attain such lofty goals as national unity and self-reliance through Social Studies programs designed to be relevant to African students' lives. Across the continent, a variety of programs emerged in response to contextual factors and local needs, serving national development goals, and influenced by idiosyncratic factors that often inhibited or precluded successful implementation of Social Studies. In Africa, Social Studies was seen as the vehicle for achieving national development through exposure to their (Africa) varied and shared histories, cultural heritage, and traditions.

### **The Concept of National Development**

Chumbow (1990) defined national development as “the nation’s human resources acting on its natural resources to produce goods (tangible and intangible) in order to improve the welfare and social well-being of citizens of the entire nation in terms of indicators of development predicated on minimum standards of living which include (among others) a reasonable standard of good health and housing facilities, food security, life expectancy (reduction of infant mortality and improvement of maternal and reproductive health), education and literacy, and employment”.

The goal of development in any sovereign nation is to achieve self-reliance and to ensure citizens, the qualitative needs of life. This pre-supposes that the country’s natural resources would be harnessed and appropriately transformed by the application of modern technology into valuable goods and services. For Awoyemi, (2000) national development can be defined as a qualitative improvement in the state or situation of an entire country or nation. According to Mastle (2000), in national development, the development of physical facilities or infrastructure like good roads, pipe borne water, well equipped hospital, good schools, etc and human development will be well appreciated by citizens. He went on to state that national development has to be all-round to make any meaning to the nation.

National development results from two dynamics. One is internal dynamic determined by the efforts of the country itself and the people; and the other is an external dynamic which comes from the indispensable advantages drawn from international cooperation in terms of technical and financial support. The internal dynamic is largely propelled by the activities of firms who actually produce the goods and services.

Shiundu (1988) stated that national development is the ability of a country or countries to improve the social welfare of the people e.g. by providing social amenities like good education, pipe born water etc. Learning (2005) defined national development as the act of accepting technological innovation in place of old forms. According to him, people today talk of national development with excitement and anxiety. The excitement comes from hope and aspirations that if ones nation is developed, there is socio-cultural reconstruction, economic development and political stability. But anxiety results from the fears we have as to whether our nation can ever reach the stage of genuine socio-cultural reconstruction, economic development and political stability.

Sociologists and social anthropologists on the other hand see national development primarily in terms of the process of differentiation that characterizes modern societies whereas political scientist focus attention on the problem of nation development as modernization occurs (Adams, 2000). National development is associated with modernization, material advancement, industrialization, scientific and technological progress, the emergence of nuclear energy, electronic and biological

revolution, new knowledge about man and his environment. It means urbanization socio-cultural transformation, mass literacy, vertical and horizontal mobility, employment opportunities and the emergence of specialized and independent occupational roles (Iziren, 1975).

National development according to Chukumerije (2008) is a composite term that encompasses many variables: advancement in educational level, socio-economic status, media exposure, agricultural innovations, and acquisition of technical knowledge, mass production and culture awareness.” It also encompasses the building of reputable national image and the presentation of such image to the world.

Furthermore, there is another notion of national development to which attention is needed. This is seen in terms of capacity of the society to store or to accumulate capital over time. The notion of capital here, it needs to be stressed is not necessarily monetary but it also implies machines for producing commodities on societal rated products or value. Indeed, some scholars like Claude Ake, Gunder Frank and Cardoso (1984) among others have used this notion of accumulation to distinguish between developed and underdeveloped countries. To these scholars, those countries that have stored up or accumulated capital and technology, they call bourgeois states, while those that have not are called underdeveloped, developing or simply peripheral states.

### **The Role of Social Studies in National Development**

It has been ascertained that Social Studies play significant role in national development. The basic role is that the concepts affect each other in many ways. The role of Social Studies in national development can be seen in the inculcation of skill, the acquisition of these skills and the application no doubt brings about development in society. The repositioning of the citizens to functionally contribute to national development and nation building are the core objectives of the Social Studies. Against this background, Amatti (1993) stated that many nations used Social Studies to achieve specific national goals. Social Studies programme in Nigeria at all levels is aimed at achieving national integration, national consciousness and national development, through the positive values that learners are exposed to.

Social Studies through its content structure expose national and international values, which broadens knowledge, experience, social interaction skills and intellectual output. In support, Joof, Mezieobi and Amadi (1994) maintained that Social Studies play important role in national development in that it equip the learner with the skills and capabilities for independent problem solving and exposing the learner to make input in knowledge development through their own generalisations, skills of creativity and independent thinking.

Social Studies aims at helping people develop the ability to make decisions so that they can shape public policy by participating in intelligent social actions. In this

regard, man's social life and various activities of social relations in communities' are examined. In another dimension, Nwakoby (1988) reported that the federal government proposes that Social Studies should be a means of achieving creativity, self-reliance and independence of mind, nationalist outlook and freedom from mental colonisation. Creativity, self-reliance and spirit of social acceptance are conditions to promote national integration, national unity and national development.

Kissock (1981) traced the development of Social Studies and pointed out that in Western Germany, it was introduced after the Second World War as means of developing a new political order and as knowledge for effective citizenship. In Britain, it was used to legitimize the teaching of social sciences particularly sociology while preparing students for their role in the society. In Japan it was used to build a foundation for a democratic society while in Canada and the United States of America, it continued its primary function of preparing students for effective citizenship in democratic society as well as national development. The idea of Social Studies as a subject was introduced to Africa at a conference held in Mombassa Kenya in 1968 (Makinde, 1979). The conference was called the conference for African education. Eleven African countries participated: namely Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Kenya Uganda, Lesotho Malawi Tanzania, Zambia and Botswana. At the conference, suggestions were made for the introduction of Social Studies in the primary schools and teacher training colleges of the member nations. The conference was held at Queens College Oxford England in 1968. African educators from eleven countries including Nigeria attended. It was agreed at the two conferences that no programmes of curriculum could be better than those, which are closely linked with the national development and aspiration of the countries, its people and the responsibilities of citizenship in the country. (Makinde, 1979). They also agreed on heritage and achievements. Other priorities included development of materials concerning cultural traditions of African ethnic groups and promotion of inter-ethnic understanding, cooperation and unity. They believed that these objectives would help to develop national pride and identity in African children thereby, promoting national development.

The purpose of introducing it in Nigeria was to inculcate the concept of nationalism, unity and interdependence among the citizenry, and at the same time promote national development. Also, the introduction of Social Studies is to inculcate skill and critical thinking as well as values in the society that will bring about qualitative positive contributions to the development of a nation. Furthermore, the purpose of Social Studies is to develop in students, positive attitudes of togetherness, comradeship and co-operation towards a healthy nation, the inculcation of appropriate values of honesty, integrity, hard work, fairness and justice at work and play.

The role of Social Studies in national development has been succinctly summarised by Obro (2007) as follows:

**1. Good Citizenship:** For growth and stability of a country, that country needs

good citizens. Citizenship education is one of the content taught in Social Studies. Students are enlightened on their rights and responsibilities to the Nigerian state. Through the teaching and inculcation of good citizenship, Social Studies help to build citizens who will perform their legal, civic and unsolicited obligations to the nation as a whole. It must be emphasized that the level of development of any nation depends solely on its citizens.

2. **Development of National Consciousness:** The citizens of a nation should not see themselves first from the perspective of their different tribes, states, region, before the perspective of their nation. This is because they are supposed to see themselves as the citizens of the nation to which they belong. Social studies help to develop national consciousness in the citizens (students) hence it teaches those things that promotes national consciousness such as national anthem, national pledge, national symbols and their interpretations. These are taught right from the primary school so that when the child grows old, he will not forget so easily.
3. **Creation of Awareness:** Social Studies exposes the students to the different resources of ones country and where they are located. It also teaches the rational use and conservation of these resources for the country development.
4. **Knowledge of Significant Development in Human Societies:** The knowledge of past events enable the citizens to have knowledge of how to prevent such happenings in the present and able to project to the future; to build a better and a trouble free society thereby bring about national development.
5. **Fostering of National Unity:** Social integration and national unity is another way in which Social Studies contribute to national development. When other cultures are exposed to the child, it makes way for cultural accommodation, high level of tolerance, reduction in religious intolerance and conflicts of various magnitudes.
6. **Moral Education and Development:** Moral education and development are aspects of Social Studies education. No nation attains great heights in national development without a crop of morally responsible citizens, who place national pride and dignity over self. Good moral education is a must to achieve stable society, especially where societal norms, moral code of conduct are put in place and recognised.

## **Conclusion**

The major objective of this paper is to examine how Social Studies can promote national development in Nigeria. A closer look of some of the reasons for the introduction of Social Studies would reveal the place or role of Social Studies in national development in Nigeria. This paper has made sufficient case for the effective



implementation of Social Studies hoping that this will have cumulative positive effort on national development in Nigeria. Thus, is the conclusion of this paper that through Social Studies students/citizens will acquire relevant and desirable attitude, skills and knowledge which will help them to become functional citizens in future so as to contribute positively to the development of a nation.

### **Recommendations**

1. Government should show positive commitment to the effective implementation of the Social Studies curriculum.
2. Social Studies should be strengthened as a catalyst for the advancement of national development.
3. Social Studies should be used as pilot in actualizing national development.
4. Social Studies as course of study in the school curriculum should be made compulsory to all students in the junior and senior secondary schools in the country.
5. Workshops, seminars and conferences should be organised for Social Studies teachers on regular basis to discuss issues and prospect that affect national development.

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