Abstract

Social studies education came as an interventionist method of nationalizing education; with the sole aim of making education relevant to top. The methods therefore employed in the teaching Social Studies are a deviation from the teaching of the traditional Art and Social Science courses in the curriculum. "Social Studies methods employed a more radical approach to teaching that centers more on the learner’s interest rather than the teacher-centered". Inquiry method is one of the most effective and more scientific and interdependent way of instilling skills of thinking and inquiry that leads to independent decision making and proffering alternative solutions to multidimensional problems we face in our society. The paper will therefore highlight on those cogent issues as it affects learning by inquiry, the basic steps in teaching Inquiry, Creative thinking, and Critical thinking.

Introduction

In formal education, a curriculum is the set of courses and their contents, offered at a school, referring to the course of deeds and experiences through which children grow and mature in becoming adults. To Tyler (1963) "curriculum is the learning experience of the students which is planned and directed by the school to attain its educational goals." Broad field curriculum is an integration of so many subjects to form a broader field of knowledge. This action is to facilitate effect learning, greater understanding and broad subject integrating learning experience to real life situations.

Social studies is the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Within the school program, Social Studies provides coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences. The primary purpose of 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.

The mission of the social studies is to develop capable citizens who are empowered with knowledge, skills, and attitudes enabling them to make informed decisions in a culturally diverse and interdependent world. (American National Council of Social Studies, 1992).

As recent as 2006, National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) was mandated to review the Social Studies curriculum through recognizing the areas of challenge in the core subject. As an amalgamation of the various arts and humanities, Social Studies in Nigerian education systems have lots of responsibilities, as citizenship education, civil education, cultural education, political education etc.

The Social Studies programme with the sole aim of infusing new sights to an educational enterprise that will presumably lead to, not only globalizing the aspect of education through instilling in the students the ability to be aware of themselves and the surrounding economic, political, physical etc environment, if fully reinvestigated, can assist in rapid national development and making education relevant, thus evolve a sort of competition in all aspects of National and International interdependence.

Inquiry Learning

Inquiry learning is an inductive process of learning which involves reasoning from a particular issue, element etc. to general phenomena. The teacher engineers the process through a number of specific examples, and then the pupils study the examples and try to pick at general patterns or ideas therein. They draw their own conclusions through identifying a broad general principle drawn from the characters or similarities of the examples given by the teachers. This often varies as the pupil's capacities to understand issues also vary.

Inquiry method according to Armstrong and Savage (2000) "is an exercise in knowledge production". Learners are asked to develop conclusions. The collection, classification and analysis of the information gathered are the aspects which give this method the nature of "inquiry". Inquiry methods are relatively a deviation from the traditional methods of teaching previously employed that was mostly around the teacher. Teachers therefore are expected to be objective and to see varied dimensions and aspects of ideas or problems.
The collection of information can be seen to be the basis of most scientific investigation and to give a foundation for the students to understand what is involved in making a decision or arriving at a conclusion about a body of facts that have been collected "through the working out a simple problem and formulation of generalizing, pupils gain necessary experience in understanding the operation of events, people and society (NERC, 1989)

Learning inquiry and thinking skills can ultimately lead to reasoned and quality method of pupils targets understanding or therefore response to issues relate

**Social Studies Education and inquiry Method**

Aknitola (1981) in National Educational Research and Development Council (NERC) (1981) emphasized that; "any effort to universalize education therefore, must be founded on a clear educational conception beyond the scope of the formal school system." Inquiry methods according to NERC (1981) "are particularly appropriate for use in Social Studies classes". They allow students to deepen their understanding of ideas, issues and wants by having to interpret and present their understanding in a formal way.

The overall goal of teaching Social Studies is for students to learn how to make knowledgeable, reasoned decisions that impact society in a positive way. Social Studies can be taught using the constructivist approach. This includes teaching that is intended to refine students' prior knowledge, develop inquiry skills through higher order and critical thinking, and lead to students developing opinions about the world around them. Teachers can also use digital resources in the teaching of current events such as promethean boards. Students can access digital photos, videos, and interviews by using various digital resources including websites.

**Basic Steps in Teaching Inquiry Skills**

Inquiry teaching is a process of applying scientific method to a variety of learning problems and is widely used in the junior secondary school Social Studies classrooms. Dewy (1910) in Armstrong and Savage (2000) suggested the following steps in sequencing inquiry instruction;

- Describe the essential features of a problem or situation.
- Suggest possible solutions or explanations.
- Gather evidence that can be used to test the accuracy of these solutions or explanations.
- Evaluate the solutions or explanations in light of this evidence.
- Develop a conclusion that is supported by the best evidence.

Depending on the concept to be taught in junior secondary school Social Studies, a variety of teaching resources are needed in teaching inquiry and thinking skills to pupils. The volume of information sometimes presented in Social Studies lessons overwhelms pupil's imaginations.

Inquiry and thinking skills lessons are used most often to generate large quantities of information from the Teacher, to be imparted to Pupils for instant comprehension. Examples are; Do you know that the earth is a big round ball that revolves round the sun in every 24 hours? Or inform pupils that there is a relationship between his geographical area and the food he eats. To a junior secondary pupil the information is large, hence triggering his thoughts on the possibility or otherwise of the information. His attention will now be focused to the teacher's ability to gradually breakdown the information, through evaluating his evidences through questioning as a form of feedback on the given information and finally concluding his lesson by reviewing his evidences.

Varieties of information and resources encourage thinking and ultimately questioning and inquisitiveness. Creativity also motivates and stimulates imagination, leading to varieties of thinking.

i. Creative thinking
ii. Critical thinking
iii. Problem solving
iv. Decision making
Creative Thinking

Creative thinking features novel approaches to perplexing problems. Many inventors in Science and Technology are creative thinkers. Slabbert (1994) in Baer (1994) opined that "to be creative is to produce something new and useful". Creative thinking helps us to adapt to changes. Experts believe that the pace of changes technologically and socially is as a result of creativity. Helping or assisting pupils in Social Studies classroom activities to be creative thinkers, will allow them to accommodate conditions that were earlier not imagined, but are practically and evidently possible and useful to them and then generality of the population.

Some recent studies by Baer. (1994) seem to suggest that, no single creative thinking lesson can be expected to generate abilities in pupils that will help them to develop creative solutions. Therefore, teachers are to expose pupils to various kinds of problems and tasks through exposing them to a variety of creative thinking experiences. This will increase the probability that they will develop thinking responses, with practical value for the different kinds of problems they will encounter as adults.

French and Rhoder (1992) in Savage (2002) opined that "there is great evidence that teachers pay less attention to junior classes in developing thinking abilities. One of the major methods of improving critical thinking technique is through brainstorming. Developed first in the field of business, it is designed to assist pupils to develop original ideas or solutions to problem. When adapted in a classroom situation, pupils are encouraged to develop as many responses as possible to a particular problem. Some of the rules of brainstorming are:

- Pupils are given a particular problem
- Pupils are asked to bring out ideas as quickly as possible
- Pupils are cautioned not to comment positively or negatively to others reactions. All ideas are accepted initially.
- The teacher allows free flow of ideas after elimination of illogical, biased, in practicable and unmeasured responses and concludes the session.
- Teachers therefore challenged to provide for as much topics as possible and pupils are charged with providing solution.

Critical Thinking

The purpose of critical thinking is to evaluate ideas. It always involves judgements based on informed opinion. Properly, these judgements should be supported by defensible criteria (Lipman, 1988).

Critical thinking encourages generation of new ideas. Its instruction is sometimes linked to creative thinking due to the fact that, pupils first create new ideas (creative thinking) and then proceeds to make judgements on the ideas they have created themselves.

Dunn and Dunn (1972) opined that this develops the adaptation of basic brainstorming technique and encourages learners to think critically. The following steps are encouraged in Social Studies classrooms for evoking critical thoughts in pupils:
- The teacher encourages pupils to consider among the given options what the best solution to a problem might be.
- Teacher asks why the idea has not been implemented earlier to solve the problem.
- Teacher asks what is to be done step by step to solve the identified problems to the earlier solution.
- Finally, pupils will be asked specifically what the first step will be towards a realistic solution of the problem.

Problem Solving

Some problems have "best", "correct", "right", or "appropriate" solutions given the evidence that is available. In working with these situations, teachers encourage pupils to follow a problem solving approach. A typical problem solving lesson includes the following steps according to Armstrong and Savage (2002).
- Identify the problem
- Consider possible approaches to its solution
- Select and apply approaches
- Reach a defensible solution

Decision Making

Many questions we face have no right answers. Various responses might be appropriate. Situations like this force individuals to choose from among alternatives. We do this by thinking about available options, weighing evidence and considering personal values. Thinking of this known as Decision-Making (Bayer, 1988).

The following steps are included in many decision making lessons:
- Identify the basis issue or problem
- Point out alternative responses
- Describe evidence supporting each alternative
- Identify values implied in each alternative
Describe possible consequence that might follow selection of each alternative
Describe evidence and values considered in making choice.

There are many possibilities for using decision-making lessons i.e. as part of effort to develop pupils citizenship skills. Many schools in the world have a student council. Only students that are familiar with the school for a number of years are allowed as members of the council, where decisions are made about their conditions through making decisions.

Conclusion

Learning, inquiry and thinking skills can ultimately lead to reasoned and quality method of pupil targeted understanding or response to issues related to the learning process. Curriculum innovation should lean towards improvement of the teaching methods that can be relied upon in; the present critical world of science and technological prowess in the economic, social and interdependent world. For Nigerian youths to compete favorably with others in the international educational arena, new ideas, methods and strategies have to be employed.

References


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