REFOCUSING SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM FOR RELEVANCE TO SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This paper examines the need to refocus social studies curriculum for sustainable national development. It focuses on the meaning and nature of curriculum pointing and very clearly the overall objectives of National Policy on Education as stated in the second National Development Plan, which is a pointer to the philosophical background of Social Studies Education as contained in the curriculum of social studies. The paper further highlights the meaning of social studies as opined by different scholars in the field of social studies. Emphasis is made on how social studies curriculum can be refocused for sustainable national development. The concepts of development and sustainable national development are discussed and various recommendations made.

Introduction

Social studies as a discipline in the field of arts and social sciences has its curriculum from the beginning designed to focus on the actualization of social studies philosophical background which according to Makinde (1980) in Ukadike (2003) is embedded in the philosophy of Nigerian education. According to the National Policy on Education, Nigeria’s philosophy of Education is based on the integration of the individual into a sound and effective citizen and the provision of equal educational opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education.

The overall objective of Nigerian education as stated in the Second National Development plan is the building of:

- a free and democratic society
- a just and egalitarian society
- a united strong and self-reliant nation
- a great and dynamic economy and
- a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens. These to a greater extent have been achieved but whatever achievement recorded over the years in the field of social studies have not reflected in most developmental issue hence the need to refocus the curriculum of social studies to enhance sustainability in our national life. Curriculum as a concept has attracted divergent opinions from numerous authors regarding its meaning. In the view of Tyler (1994) in Ukadike (2003), many educational programmes do not have clearly defined purposes. In the same vein, Brennan (1997) maintains that curriculum is not the same as teaching. He states further that for education to be highly effective. It requires, a combination of good curriculum with good teaching. He therefore defines curriculum as “a course of studies to be followed in the process of acquiring education.” Urevbu (1991) stated that the term curriculum came from the Latin word “currere” meaning to “run” or “to run a course”. From this original meaning, the word curriculum has come to mean a course of study, containing the body of subject matter officially taught in schools. However, this definition is a narrow one according to Urevbu (1991) mainly because curriculum goes beyond the issue of teaching in classroom situations to such areas that may not be academic but educationally significant, such areas as the application of knowledge and skills acquired in schools to real life situations.

Curriculum involves a wide range of inquiry into how to create an educational environment. It includes what is taught in schools, how it is taught to what group of pupils and how it is organized. The curriculum of social studies education is developed in such a way that will make the aims and objectives of the course content easily attainable, but this is only possible if the manpower need of social studies education is made available in the right quality and quantity and the teaching and learning environment made conducive, the instructional resources provided and made available, and the will to achieve success is motivated.
Social studies is the study of man and his interaction with his immediate environment. Social studies is an interdisciplinary subject that draws upon many disciplines, including history, geography, economics and political science. Social studies focuses on peoples relationship with their social, physical, spiritual, cultural, economic, political and technological environments. The knowledge of social studies helps students become active and responsible citizens within their communities, locally, nationally, and globally, in a complex and changing world. NERC (1980) defined social studies as a way of seeing, viewing and approaching things with social regard to their proper place and fraction in the ordering and management of man’s total natural, social and technological environment. CESAC (1979) also defined social studies as a relationship between science and technology, their impact on a man and his ever changing environment.

DuBey et al (1980) opined that social studies is the investigation of human activity. It studies man at home, at work, at workshop, in politics, at play, in the village, in the nation, everywhere, engaged in is busy programme of living. They further assert that social studies is particularly interested in man’s problems and how to proffer solutions to these problems affecting man in his social milieu. Also Esegbe (1998) in Odor and Nwaham (2005:2) on his part defined social studies as the study of the various interactions between man and his environment. He continues by saying that all “this environment consists of the various things that surrounds man, which exert much influence to the life of man either positively or negatively.

According to Ukadike (2003), social studies is an interdisciplinary field of study which cuts across all the subjects in the field of social sciences and humanities. Udeniya (1999) I Odor and Nwaham (2005) states that social studies is an integrated study of man and the outcome of his interactions with his various environment. Although social studies sis aimed at impacting knowledge and providing valuable information necessary for life, its basic function is to help pupils to inculcate desirable social habits, attitudes and values, as well as useful skills, so much need for the survival of the individuals in the society and the entire human environment. It spans across exploiting the environment to the skills needed to protect and preserve the eco-system.

The nature and content of social studies is based on its integrated content and methodology. The subject focuses on problems of man’s survival in the process of his interaction with his environments. Social studies deals with man in his social and physical environment as well as examine the effects of science and technology on both man and his environments. Social studies education as an integrated study focuses on the problems of man’s survival and struggle in the process of his interaction with his environment as contained in its curriculum from the beginning. It is obvious that all he definitions in this study lay so much emphasis on the understanding and the analysis of man and his relationship with his immediate environment. The demand of today’s education goes beyond the acquisition of knowledge and information to the application of the information and the knowledge acquired for the good of man and his total environment hence the need to refocus and redirect social studies curriculum.

The Concept of Sustainable National Development

Sustainable development as a concept has attracted several definitions from different scholars in the field of politics, social sciences and humanities. Sustainable Development is derived from the word development. Onyemelukwe (1977) in Onyesam (2005), opined that development involves a society’s transformation of its environment through its institutions, organization, social rules to an extent that makes the society more and more positively responsive to desire modern changes. Implication of this definition of development is that development involves transformation and that the transformations are dependent upon the society’s institutional make up as well as its social cultural and attitudinal set up. Tomori (1977) in Onyesom (2005) asserts that development implies the complete modernization of a society. If entails the conversion of a peasant society into an industrial one. it means a change in the whole way of life of a people in such areas as expectations and motivations, and even the physical environment and of daily life itself. The meaning of development has gone beyond the narrow perspectives of economics as it affects of man and his environments, both social, physical, political religious, cultural, psychological etc.
National development on the other hand implies not only national economic growth such as increase in output or production but also qualitative and quantitative changes in the individual’s self esteem and self confidence. It involves improvements in social institutions and levels of living, as well as excitement of quest for modernization, reorganization and re-orientation of entire economic, political and social system the non-economic issues in development include human rights protection, self respect, self confidence, education, (Onyesam, 2005).

Sustainable national development is the form of development efforts in a nation that can be continued for a long time in a way that does not harm the environment. In looking at the concept of sustainable development, the World Commission on environment and Development (WCED) defines it as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs.” It goes to recognize the inevitability of contending interpretations of the concept, but nevertheless argues that these “must share certain general features and must flow from a consensus on the basic concept of sustainable development and on a broad strategic framework for achieving it”.

Refocusing Social Studies Curriculum for the Challenges Ahead

Curriculum has been described in various ways as discussed above, therefore in summary, curriculum can simply be regarded as all the learning experiences that learners must undergo in a programme of education whose purpose is to achieve broad based goals and related specific objectives, these objectives in relation to social studies is to create awareness and consciousness in the society and to further develop knowledge, skills and abilities which to some extent have been achieved but to put the acquired knowledge, skills and abilities into use is what is grossly lacking in the present social studies curriculum hence the need to redirect social studies curriculum to more practical issues of governance, Environment management and conservation in order to enhance sustainable development in our society. Social studies curriculum has originally been designed to impart values and information necessary for the development of individuals in the society and equally a corrective study. This basically has not met the recent trend in world developmental strategy in recent times hence the need to refocus social studies curriculum to redirect its focus towards building in the role of individuals in the attainment of sustainable national development, in the envisaged curriculum.

This can be achieved by firstly, calling for and organizing a curriculum review committee whose duty and responsibilities will be to redirect the content of the existing curriculum to include the role of social studies and the individuals in the society towards attaining national development. secondly, by re-orienting Social studies Teachers from their initial conception of social studies as an informative and corrective discipline to leadership training.

The application of knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to become active and responsible citizens, engaged in the practice of democratic ideals, and aware of their capacity to effect change and also understand their rights and responsibilities in order to fully participate in society, demonstrate a critical understanding of the role of social, political and legal institutions in promoting, individual and collective well-being, respect the dignity and support the equality of all human beings.

The refocused social studies curriculum should be explicit in the area of showing understanding on how political and economic distributions of power affect individuals, communities, and nations. It should develop a consciousness for the limits of nature and a sense of stewardship for the physical environment and should show commitment to the practice of sustainable national development. there is the need to, amongst other things, infuse peace education, crises management and control into the new curriculum with an awareness of the ethical consequence of decision-making in our society.

Conclusion

This position statement calls for a renewed effort by social studies experts, schools and communities to teach practical aspects of skill, knowledge, attitude and civic virtue towards efforts to achieve sustainable national development. this is a critical time in the history of our democracy in particular and national life in general when the social fabric that bins us as a people appears to be
weakening and the desire towards nation building is dying down. The schools and especially social studies educators have a critical role to play.

The development of civic virtue and redirecting of social studies students and educators require much more than traditional didactic methods of social studies instruction. The refocusing of the entire social studies curriculum is vital, the focus of social studies, curriculum needs to be widened to encompass personal contribution and commitment towards attaining sustainable national development.

Social studies curriculum should be refocused and reorganized towards making effort to achieve leadership training, accountability and transparency in governance, political tolerance and democratic sustainability, coordinated waste disposal behavior in a bid to add value to the physical environment, respect for human right, dignity of human labour, peace building, ethno-religious tolerance and self-reliance. It is when this is done that sustainable national development will be achieved through social studies education.

Recommendations

The effort towards refocusing social studies curriculum for relevance in sustainable national development can be achieved if the government will urgently put in place curriculum review committee whose primary objective will be to give social studies a new direction and a new look where students need to understand, develop, practice, and value citizenship skills when they are provided with authentic opportunities to participate as citizens within the classroom, their individual community. The new curriculum should provide students with opportunities to develop a consciousness for a sense of responsible stewardship, and a commitment to the concept of sustainable national development.

The new curriculum should also state clearly why students need to be provided with opportunities to use and manage information and communication technologies critically, and to understand the historical and ongoing impact of media and technology on the individual and the society at large. Equipping of social studies rooms and adequate funding of the entire social studies programme, in-service training for teaching and non teaching staff in the field of social studies education are panaceas for achieving sustainable national development.

References


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