

STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE TEACHING OF SOCIAL STUDIES IN THE JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL

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Abstract

The teaching of social studies has suffered a great deal in this country. Part of the problem emanates from conceptual misunderstanding of what social studies is all about. This misunderstanding has given rise to methodological difficulty in the teaching of the subject hence, subject specialists from which social studies derived its content approach the teaching of the subject from the point of view of their parent discipline. As a synthesis of the social sciences with emphasis on citizenship education, such an approach is wrong. As a humanistic subject it lends itself more to the teaching strategies that are activity-based. This is because the acquisition of social skills is made relevant and brought closer to activity when such skills are dramatized, role-played, mimed, discussed etc.

Introduction

One of the fundamental problems facing teachers in the various fields of human endeavour today is how the teaching-learning process can be made easy with a teacher using minimal effort and achieving greater result in learning. In an attempt to face up to this challenge educational theoreticians and practitioners have proliferated teaching strategies that would guarantee meaningful teaching-learning process to ensure desirable learning outcomes. With the compartmentalization of knowledge into discrete areas for specialization specific teaching strategies have been devised by subject specialists to combat teaching-learning huddles in their field of specialization.

Social studies lends itself more to the application of teaching strategies that are activity-based. This is largely due to the fact that social studies deals with social skills of effective living in society. When facts or skills are learned with relevant learning activities the longer the retention of what is learned and the greater the chances of it being internalized by the learner.

It is contended in this paper that if social studies teachers are to equip their students with social skills and values which are the goals of social studies education, then, they must be committed to the effective utilization of learning activities that will bring about effective teaching. The scope of this paper is therefore to identify some of the learning strategies that are available to the teacher of social studies and how best those strategies can be gainfully employed in the classroom to ensure meaningful or effective teaching and learning of social studies.

For proper comprehension of this paper, it is pertinent to pause briefly to look at the concept and nature of social studies before proceeding to discuss some of the strategies that when effectively utilized can facilitate the teaching and learning of social studies.

Concept and Nature of Social Studies

- Social studies is one of the core courses taught in the junior secondary schools in Nigeria. It is a relatively new subject in the intellectual landscape of this country. As a humanistic academic enterprise it focuses on the activities of man in his social and physical environments. Fadeiye (1990) defines social studies as "the study of man in his environment". The environments he contended, "may be physical, social, economic, political, scientific, technological, cultural etc. Kissock (1981) defines social studies as "a programme of study which a society uses to instill in students the knowledge skills, attitudes, and actions it considers important concerning the relationships human beings have with each other, their world, and themselves¹".

The main thrust of social studies in the junior secondary school in Nigeria is therefore the indications of skills for effective living in the home, social group and in our physical environment (Mkpa, 1986). It is intended to help the learners to be functional and useful members of their society through the creation of awareness of their culture the need for unity, the respect for values of the society and how societal resources can be harnessed to enhance development. Since social studies is concerned with learning societal values and ensures behavioural conformity with the goals of society, it

is necessary to emphasize that effective inculcation can only be done if important topics in social studies are made to recur all through the three years of junior secondary school. For instance, topics like man's environment, cooperation through economic and social institutions, culture etc. should be repeated in the three years of junior secondary school in ascending order of complexity (Mkpa, 1986) to consolidate their learning experience.

Having discussed the intellectual orientation of social studies as a discipline attention will now be focused on the strategies to be employed to ensure effective teaching of social studies in the junior secondary schools in Nigeria.

Strategies for Maximising Teaching and Learning of Social Studies in the Junior Secondary Schools

If teaching as conceptualized by Clark (1968) is the set of "activities that are designed and preformed to produce change in student (pupil) behaviour", it then means that to be an effective teacher is not only how much facts one knows but also how the teacher can make the learning experiences conducive to the learner. This means the learning environment whether mental or physical must be enriched to ensure better learning outcome. This calls for the application of appropriate teaching strategies to maximize learning in line with set educational goals (Akuezuilo, 1989).

Gone were the days when teachers were seen as "prestigious figures standing majestically before an audience and sonorously making important pronouncements" (Mkpa, 1983). By presenting lessons in this way, the teacher learns from the students. This is wrong. The work of a teacher is simply to guide and provide clues to the learner by removing all the obstacles that are likely to make the process of learning unpleasant and difficult. For a teacher to succeed in his task of teaching, Wheeler (1978) suggests that:

- 1) Learners must be active rather than passive.
- 2) Learners must not only be active participants in a teaching-learning situation, but they should understand what they are learning.
- 3) The wider the range of experiences, to which the learners are exposed to, the greater will be the possibility of discrimination and generalization.

Reiterating the point raised by Wheeler, Chauhan (1981) contended that the teaching-learning process becomes easy when the learning experiences and other activities are made relevant to the personal life of the learner. This stresses the need to appeal to students' senses when teaching. When a teacher appeals to the sense of hearing, sight, smell, touch and taste, the result is that these senses will have effects on each other thereby facilitate learning. The acquisition of social skills and attitude can better be learned when a teacher uses, problem-solving and experimentation strategies, by involving the student in a number of activities. The learning and internalization of social skills becomes permanent when students are given the opportunity to role-play, dramatize, experiment etc.

Describing the usefulness of this approach to teaching, Bruner (1969) posed question thus: How can we teach someone to ride a bicycle or learn to swim other than getting them to make an attempt and learn from experience and through the muscles of the body?"

For any learning activity to yield positive result it must be based on the following criteria as suggested by Onwuka (1984):

- 1) **Pacing:** The material to be learnt must be related to students' ability.
- 2) **Sequencing of Learning Materials:** The learning materials should be organized sequentially from simple to complex. This starts from fact learning, then to concept formation, principles etc.
- 3) The teacher should endeavour to appeal to students' senses of sight, touch, smell, test and hearing by providing various teaching aids.
- 4) **Questioning:** There should be meaningful interaction between the teacher and the students where questions are asked and answers given.
- 5) **Evaluation:** Teacher can engage students in discussion, small written test or assignment.

Fundamental to successful teaching is the stating of behavioural objectives, once clearly stated in measurable terms, it then becomes easy for a teacher to "manipulate relevant learning activities to accomplish his task (Okam, 1995). The stating of behavioural objectives gives a directional focus to the lesson and keeps the teacher within what is planned.

Some teachers fail in the business of teaching because of their usage of high sounding phraseology which often distort the communication link between them and the students. The use of simple expression in explaining and describing learning materials is essential in social studies as this does not only help to ease comprehension but also enables students relate what they have learnt to their daily life experiences (Okam, 1998).

Every community regardless of its size and people is of paramount importance to the study of social studies. The resources found in the community could be used to supplement books, pictures and teaching note which a teacher might use in the classroom. Teaching using societal resources like post office, police station, market, museum, zoo, banks, local craft, hospital/clinic etc. makes learning practical and permanent in students and foster close links between the school and the community (DuBey, 1980).

Since the acquisition of social skills is largely based on rehearsal through series of activities, social studies content must be matched with relevant activities to enable a teacher carry out his task effectively. According to Mkpa (1986) the following topics/contents and the corresponding activities -can help to facilitate effective teaching and learning of social studies.

Below are Topics/Contents and Learning Activities for Social Studies

Unit/Content	Relevant Activities
UNIT I: Social Environment	
The Study of Social Studies	1. Large or small group may be formed to discuss the merits and demerits of each method of teaching social studies.
Primary Social Organization	1. Discovering the meaning of complex words/terms related to the family.
	2. Preparing the family tree of each student.
	3. Group discussion of the duties of each family member.
	4. Group discussion on kinship relation.
	5. Finding out roles of age groups in development of towns.
Secondary Social Organization	1. Making charts to show the duties of some social organizations.
	2. Group discussion on the importance of voluntary organization.
	3. Taking part in the activities of any voluntary organization.
	4. Visit to towns to see contribution of any social organization (groups) to the development of towns and villages.
UNIT 2: Physical Environment	5. Watching some social organizations holding to see how they are organized.
Meaning and example of physical Features	1. Group discussion on aspect of physical features.
	2. Out of class visit of highlands, lowlands and bodies of water around us.
	3. Finding out the importance of physical features.
	4. Studying the map to see the position of some physical features in Nigeria.
	5. Drawing the map of the village to show the positions of physical features in it.
How physical features influence man's life, communication and settlement	1. Visit the school farms to see soil types.
	2. Excursion to communities living in highland, lowland and riverine areas.
	3. Interviewing people in different environments to learn their way of life.
	4. Observing and recording the occupations of our people.
	5. Group discussion on the merits and problems of communication.
	6. Observing various means of communication
	7. Groups identify and suggest solutions to the problems of communication in our society.
	8. Groups discuss various settlement patterns.

	9. Observing the settlement pattern in the nearest society.
Living in Urban and Rural Areas	10. Collecting oral tradition on the early settlement pattern of the school's community.
	1. Drawing to illustrate various settlements pattern.
	1. Collecting and study pictures of urban and rural areas.
	2. Visits to urban and rural areas to observe various aspects of life in the two areas.
	3. Discussion of life in rural and urban areas.
	4. Debate on the merits and problems of rural and urban dwelling.
	5. Collecting oral tradition on growth of towns.

The work of a teacher is to select, form the list of available learning activities to facilitate learning. These activities can be incorporated into the lesson using the main techniques.

- 1) Presentation Technique: The presentation is concerned mainly with providing classroom information. These include lectures, demonstration, audio-visual presentation, field trips or tours. In presenting the lesson the teacher may show, tell, demonstrate or dramatize.
- 2) Action Technique: This involves project, experiment exercise, guided observation.
- 3) Interaction Technique: This involves questioning discussion quiz, gaming, role-playing and interviewing, dramatization and debates.

Skill acquisition needs a lot of activities. But activities can only be useful if they are used in line with principles of selecting learning experiences. This means that what is to be learned must suit the learner's developmental ability.

Conclusion

The teaching and learning of social skills, values and attitude can be effective if the learner is exposed to a number of activities such as experimentation, dramatization, role playing, observation, collecting of facts from parents, market women, police station, banks. Such learning activities are important in the teaching of social studies. Many students pass through the educational system without being educated because of the failure of some teachers to appeal to all their senses by using appropriate teaching strategies that will enable them relate what they have learned to real life situation.

The teachers of today must embrace this challenge to make teaching learning situation rewarding and as a means of solving societal problems.

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