SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION IN NIGERIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM: TRENDS, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract
This paper attempts to discuss the concept of social studies education, nature, scope and content of social studies, historical development of social studies, current issues in social studies education and examine future prospects of social studies education in Nigeria.

Introduction
The development of social studies curriculum is fairly new. Its development, though of a short duration, has an important history in the school curriculum. This is because of the impact its introduction has made on the school curriculum.

The introduction of social studies as a subject became very prominent when Nigeria realised that the type of education inherited from the colonial administration was not meeting her needs. The type of curriculum handed over to her alienated Nigerian child from her own community. Instead he became more inclined to British community knowing more of its history, geography, literature, etc. (Makinde, 1979). To buttress the above claim Fafunwa (1974) said that the system of education, instead of developing positive values in the society in which the African child lives, tends to alienate him from his cultural environment.

The emerging dysfunctionalism and the experience of the civil war in Nigeria (1967 - 1970) brought about the need for the type of education that would meet the needs of the people. To this end, several seminars, workshops, and conferences were held to elucidate and clarify views on the right and appropriate education to meet the needs of the country. Among such conferences was the National Curriculum Conference of 1969 which was held in Lagos. This conference would for a long time continue to have positive effect on educational development in Nigeria. Many national educational objectives were identified in this conference and endorsed in the National Policy on Education (NPE, 1977). One of such objectives is the inculcation of national consciousness and national unity for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society (NPE, 1977, Pg. 4). The objective, for example has far reaching implications for curriculum development in general and for social studies curriculum in particular. This paper therefore, discusses the present status of social studies education in Nigeria and what future prospects are envisaged.

Concept Of Social Studies Education
Recent efforts in social studies development have identified the study of man as a social being as the central focus, trying to point out man’s interaction in the environment. Based on this, many conceptions of social studies education have emerged.

Wesley and Adams (1952) stressed the original meaning of social studies: the school subject which deals with human relationship. They noted that the term had been confused with socialism, social services, social reforms, social problems and social welfare. The term social studies became the collective name for the instructional materials concerned with human relationships just as the social sciences became the collective term for the scholarly research materials dealing with human relationships. No particular type of organisation of materials is required. The programme can be organised as subjects, as series of fused subjects, as problems or projects, as units or topics, or as activities and experiences. Perhaps the conclusion of Wesley and Adams emphasised the dynamic nature of social studies.

Smith (1967) viewed social studies as learning and practising the necessary knowledge and skills needed to function effectively in the society both as children and adults. The parent subjects are the social sciences but social studies do not wholly depend on them; the documents of the mother subjects can even become outdated. Smith seems to have underscored social studies as skill development.

Jaromilek and Walsh (1969) observed that the social studies are concerned with human relationships; their content is derived principally from the scholarly disciplines of economics, geography, history, political science, sociology, archaeology, and social psychology. Social studies implies no particular form of curricular organisation.
Thompson et al. (1977) believed that what is significant about any subject is the way of thinking it encourages in those who teach and learn it. In their opinion, social studies encourages three vital ways of thought: awareness of the world, development of skills of looking at the world and of interpreting what we see and development of attitudes towards our fellow human beings in society.

Thompson and his associates distinguished between social studies and environmental studies: the later in the study of place, people and work, while the former takes a wider look at society. They added that environmental studies may also stress the scientific aspects of the environment more than social studies. They ended that section on the note that there is a great deal in common in the two.

A point worth mentioning is that social studies focuses on attitudes and values more than rigorous study of natural or physical phenomena. Social studies centres on the effect of situation and things and things on man rather than those situations and things which the natural and physical sciences dwell on.

Thompson and his associates identified three problems of separate subjects:
2. The world cannot be divided completely into separate subjects.
3. Learning and thinking are not divided into separate little compartments unless schools and teachers force this artificial division on them.

Something which emerges is that social studies is perhaps more suitable for learning from the age of accountability to adolescence than separate subjects.

Ozoro (1979) saw social studies as a way of looking at the society in order to understand its structure, its problems and to see ways of solving some of the problems. Social studies should be studied as an important tool to understand the diversity that exists in a society like Nigeria where there are belief systems. Ozoro recommended that a broad framework of studying the society will hopefully help the pupils to grow up to be good citizens of Nigeria and the world.

Comparative Education Studies and Adaptation Centre (CESAC) and Heinemann Educational Books (1979) conceptualised social studies as the study of man in his social and physical environments and how man uses sciences and technology to exploit the two environments. The scope, accordingly, is three dimensional: Man and his social environment, man and his physical environment; man and science and technology.

Adaralegbe (1980) opined that social studies is not the study of individual subjects nor is it an amalgam of such subjects, adding that social studies is the totality of experiences a student goes through having been exposed to such a course on man’s interminable problems in chosen environments. Something obvious is that the Nigerian Educational Research Council (NERC) and Adaralegbe’s conceptions are quite similar NERC (1980) perceived social studies as totality of experiences: the study of man as a biological, social, spiritual, political, economic being, responsible and responsive to nature in all its ramifications. The seemingly over-ambitious nature of selection are obvious. However, those issues may only depict the dynamic nature of the subject. This, perhaps, is the reason why Adeyoyin (1990) referred to social studies as relevant education. Succinctly, any education considered relevant qualifies as aspect of social education.

Nwagu (1981) intended to educate people on the teaching of concepts, values and attitudes in social studies but gave a kind of conception of social studies. He cited John Lee as noting that social studies is concerned with the study of five major topics: Man, ideas, environment, time, space (all are meant to serve man). We may therefore say that the focus is still man.

Akinlaye (1981) proposed to show the emergence of social studies and why, by presenting documentary evidence. There was the need for a subject that would pick up the neglected areas such as the nature and crisis of environment, plight of men, food supply, housing and health inflation, population etc. Akinlaye conceived social studies as involving a study of the basic characteristics of man and a detailed investigation into the many and varied expressions of the adaptation with other men. t his definition and the whole of Akinlaye’s paper depicted social studies as focusing on man more than other subjects. However, this assertion is questionable as other subjects can equally claim to centre on man at least implicitly (Johnson, 1948). Nevertheless, Akinlaye’s paper tends to show us that social studies is a searcher for relevant education as theorised by Adeyoyin (1990).

Adeyoyin (1987) exposed the current conception of social studies as it relates to curriculum
development. She observed that social studies draws from the relevant old subjects like geography, history, anthropology, political science, economics etc. Adeyoyin added that social studies has varied conceptions which include citizenship education, skill development, ecological studies, social sciences and as a discipline. In her 1993 assertion, she identified many conceptions which include cultural integration, dynamic education, knowledge of self and relevant education. The later conception tend to give social studies the liberty to draw content from any desirable area of knowledge.

At this juncture, it is important to note that social studies is not the study of history, geography, economics, etc. nor an amalgam of the above separate subjects. The new social studies as opined by Ogundare (1989) is a “multi-disciplinary study of man and his social and environmental problems of survival...” The subject is more of “social studies” than integrated social sciences, as it is wrongly conceptualised.

Justifying Social Studies As An Academic Discipline

The word “academics” according to Adekoya (1998) means belonging to or having to do with academy in a college or university. To be academic, one must be scientific in his approach which equally implies that one should be able to make a thorough study. To study social studies as an academic discipline is to draw out how the subject can be studied in a scientific, well planned and directed manner in any institution of learning.

For a long time, social studies was misunderstood, misinterpreted and misrepresented. It is true that social studies was implemented in Nigeria prior to the availability of sufficient or satisfactory teaching learning materials (Dubey, 1980). Because of this loop-hole, people of little skill but with a good eye for commercial success produced books which gave wrong impression about the new subject area. They were traditional in approach and superficial in content with “watered down” concepts of social studies (Dubey, 1980).

The Nature, Scope And Content Of Social Studies Education

Balyejusa (1981) said the following about the nature of social studies education: That social studies is seen as a Nigerian idea, and creation of the concerned educators and philosophers. People like Fafunwa, Adaralegbe; Obebe, Makinde, Tafawa - Balewa and a host of others readily come to mind; That people see Nigerian social studies as a natural development that comes as a result of cultural flow and transfer of ideas. Initially social studies appeared as a carbon copy of some programmes existing in America and Britain. At the moment Nigeria has gone far to initiate the Nigerian social studies programme (NSSP). Unlike America, NSSP is on the national basis. Hence, Nigeria has national curriculum in her institutions.

That social studies incorporates all aspects of reform, revitalisation and maintenance of the educational values, knowledge and skills expected of a people concerned about progress and modernisation.

That social studies emphasises the importance of man. Man is placed in a central position, and his activities are studied in relation to his various environment, which could be physical, social or psychological. Man can only exist in his varied environments by understanding, interacting, organising and running his society in an orderly cultural, economic and political setting. As a result social studies education try to gather relevant knowledge, values, skills, centred around the subjects that form parts of these broad spheres of man.
The Scope Of Nigerian Social Studies Education

Social studies becomes a subject after it has stated its objectives and formulated the correct materials that would be passed on to learners. It is centred around man, that is, how man manipulates and is manipulated by the various environments in which he finds himself. Thus, the subject has to include knowledge, skills, concepts, attitudes and values drawn from history, geography, physical science, economics, psychology, sociology, philosophy and anthropology. In going through the various disciplines of social science it aimed at selecting and incorporating relevant content materials related to man, society and the interaction that resulted from the interrelationship.

The general pattern of content arrangement seems to follow a spiral or expanding horizon format as shown below.


The Content of Social Studies Education

Social studies education draws its content from all the social sciences and humanities. Its content is based on its integrated concept. The content focus on problems of man’s survival in the process of interaction with the environment.

Obebe (1996) summed it in this way: “In looking for the content of social studies, we look at the art, the drama, dances and songs of the society that will enrich the content of what the student will learn. The humanities present opportunities to learn language, literature and culture of the people while in the social sciences we look at the art of governing by studying the theories, systems, structure and the processes of government. In anthropology and sociology, the culture, social institutions, the individual, the group and the society itself, all put together are the sources of social studies content through which the learners gather information which he can process with a determination to gain knowledge”.

Peculiarities of Social Studies

If social studies education draws its content from all the social sciences and humanities, what
makes it different from these disciplines? As earlier indicated social studies has identified the study of man as a social being as the central focus, trying to point out man’s interaction in the environment.

Ololubou (1987) sees social studies as focusing on man and his environmental problems and man's attempt to solving those problems. Furthermore, social studies according to Ololubou seeks to produce an “effective citizenry” through promotion of cognition, development of need skills, and encouragement of desirable attitudes and actions, using integrated approach. Adeyemi (1989) defined integrated approach to social studies as organising instruction around fundamental questions, topics, or social problems. Fie added that this method employs the holistic approach - a problem or a topic is best tackled by using appropriate knowledge from the social sciences, seeing the topic as a whole.

One major objective of social studies is to assist men in studying and learning about problems of survival in his environment. In focusing on problems, it takes into consideration all conceivable factors and aspects of the problem be these historical, geographical, political, economical, sociological, psychological, scientific and technological. The curriculum thus, employs the systems analytical approach to the identification and study of problems of man in his multi-faceted environment. It also uses a horizontal and spiral approach for the analysis of societal problems. Social studies is no longer seen as the study of traditional subjects as separate and individual subject, with many overlapping areas. It is not just a mere allegation of these traditional subjects, but an integrated curriculum for wholesome education.

Problems of Social Studies Education

There is no doubt, social studies is faced with some glaring problems. With regards to social studies in Nigeria educational system, five visible problems are confirmed.

The first is the lukewarm attitude of scholars in accepting the subject as a distinct discipline at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. At the moment, social studies is still not regarded as a serious subject especially in secondary and post - secondary institutions. Most of the times. Attempts to introduce social studies are met with oppositions from teachers of the traditional subjects of geography, history, economics, civic, etc. These teachers are of the opinion that there is nothing new in the subject social studies. Moreover, these teachers believe that the syllabus for social studies lacks focus and nothing promising can come out of it. There is also the fear that their own students might be “stolen” as a result of a possible large-scale attraction to the subject.

Another problem is that the teachers of the subject were produced long after the subject itself was introduced. It is a confirmed fact that the subject was introduced without teachers and teacher-trainers at the onset of the programme.

Connected to the above is lack of follow-up strategy to ensure that those teachers trained for this subject actually carry out the teaching of the subject especially at the primary and junior secondary schools. Instead teachers of traditional subjects listed above are opted to teach social studies. It is no wonder, these same teachers have little or no regards for the subject.

Another problem is the lukewarm attitudes of some examining bodies to fully accept social studies as one of those that are annually examined both for regular and private students. They are of the opinion that social studies is a duplication of the conventional subject that it was drawn from.

Finally, there is the problem of acute shortage of instructional materials that would facilitate both the teaching and learning of the subject. The instructional materials are scarce and the tendency is to use any available one irrespective of its relevance to the subject.

Prospects of Social Studies Education

No matter what angle we look at social studies, its proper and adequate implementation has the following to offer both individuals and the nation.

Social studies should help the learner to develop fully his ability as an intelligent, law-knowing, law-obeying, self-supporting citizen. He should respect the national tag, as a mark of citizenry (Adeyoyin, 1981).
From the various concepts of social studies education discussed earlier in this paper, the new social studies programmes have been structured to include:

a. concepts, awareness, and understanding of the child's social physical, economic, political and religious environments;
b. man’s interactions and relationships with these various environments;
c. problems arising from these interactions and relationships and
d. man’s endeavours to solve these problems (NERC, 1971);

(Jaromelik, 1967, Lawton and Dadfour, 1973) quoted by Bolarin, 1996. With regards to the role of social education in national development, Bolarin, 1996 noted the following:

1. The prime concern of social studies education is the production of effective citizens which connotes, among other things: sensitivity to one’s environment; active participation in polity; democratic oriented mind and practical willingness to assume and perform civic responsibilities; obedience to the laws of the land; one equipped with intellectual skills essential for national decision-making and sound judgement; dogged defence of one’s rights; ability to understand, respect and accommodate other individuals; habits essential for effective social living; positive relationship with the political class; harmonious co-existence with each other, members and group in one’s polity and possession of nationalist and patriotic spirit geared toward social improvement.

2. Social studies education more than any school subject, emphasizes effective learning.

3. Social studies education has been given a pride of place in the school curricular with a view, among other things to dismantle factors such as primordial ties and ethnic consciousness which impede national development.

4. The methodological emphases of social studies education which focus on thought-provoking or investigation-oriented methods and the rigours which they entail, equip the learners with the reflective thinking skills which would enable them question the way of things in the society. This has implications for finding answers to Nigeria’s development problems as to accelerate the pace of development through national decision-making.

5. Social studies teaching-learning process is activity-packed and so elicits the active involvement and participation of the learners in the interactive process. Consequently, the participative consciousness can lead one to make contribution, directly or indirectly, to national development via active socio-political participation.

6. Social studies is so flexible that it accommodates current issues and problems relevant to national development and proffers suggestions for improvement or elimination of such issues and problems that are antithetical to national development via national decisionmaking.

7. The compartmentalization of knowledge in the social sciences and humanities presents the learner with a false view of real life situation. On the other hand, when knowledge is organised in an integrated manner (such as social studies is emphasizing) the learner is made to develop an integrated view of reality, that would enable him make well-thought out and rational suggestions geared towards national development after viewing the world as an integral whole or a holistic frame and not as separate fragments. Well articulated proposals for national development cannot result from the perception of knowledge or the society in compartmentalised frame but rather as an integral whole (Mezieobi. 1994 quoted by Bolarin, 1996).

Conclusion

Curriculum in social studies education is all encompassing. Social studies education is an academic discipline and it should be considered in a most rational manner, in relation to the aims, the goals, the objectives, the content, for different categories of learners at all levels of our educational systems.

The future of social studies education has been discussed and it is discovered that the content of social studies education if properly planned and executed is likely to lead to a rapid development of the
nation in all its ramifications.

Finally, it is advisable for social studies education teachers to be versatile, knowledgeable, open-minded to enable them to see and perform their professional role as facilitators, helping students explore, discover and generate ideas. Teachers should expose learners to a variety of situations, guide them to discover things themselves, think reflectively and allow them to come to their own independent judgement.

References


Obebe, B. J. (1987), The Development of Social Studies Education in Nigeria and some Recent Research
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