

REFOCUSING THE SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM FOR A FUNCTIONAL UBE PROGRAMME

G. C. Edozie

Abstract

No society is static in (he strict sense because changes of varying dimensions are ever taking place in it. Education must of necessity keep puce with these changes. This it must do by generating knowledge and skills lo deal with not only the needs and aspirations of society but also contemporary life issues. The commencement of the Universal Basic Education (DUE) programme is a landmark opportunity Tor curriculum re-engineering in Nigeria. This is particularly so because of the UI3H's responsive nature. The obvious implication is that subject curricula would need refocusing. Social Studies, as an integrated curriculum, is strategically positioned to deal with such contemporary life issues as violence, terrorism, conflicts, neglect/exclusion, environmental degradation, population growth, as well as sustainable governance and international understanding amongst others. This paper which attempted a redefinition of social studies in (he light of its strategic position, also put forward such innovative study fields as peace education, community education, population and family life education, and so on with which its curriculum could be enriched. The paper also advanced strategies for implementing these inclusions for the refocusing of Social Studies curriculum.

Introduction

The dynamic nature of society triggers changes in needs, values and aspirations. A number of contemporary life issues often emanate from these changes and they include such socio-economic issues like cuitism, violence, terrorism, familial as welt as intra-and inter-community conflicts, corruption, tribalism, exclusion/neglect lack of popular and political will, poor leadership and followership, high population growth, environmental degradation, poverty, and the like. Since education is the cornerstone of social development and economic emancipation, school curricula must keep pace with issues of contemporary life.

With the launching of the UBE programme in September 1999, a refocusing of the school curricula is necessary to achieve its laudable objectives, which amongst others include:

- Developing in the citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion.
- The provision of free, universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school age.
- Reducing drastically the incidence of drop-outs from the formal school system (through improved relevance, quality and efficiency).
- Catering for the learning needs of young persons who, for one reason or another, have had lo interrupt their schooling through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education.
- Ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate level of literacy, numeracy, manipulation, communicative and life skill as well as the ethical, moral and civil values needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning (Obanya, 2000).

Aside these clear objectives, the UBE's distinctive features, curriculum imperatives, and its comparison with past attempts at popular education in Nigeria have been discussed elaborately elsewhere (Edozie, 2000; Edozie, Nduka and Iyamu, 2000).

A refocusing of the school curricula is inevitable for the UBH to be made functional. Innovative study fields like peace education, community education, international education, and so on would of Base on the above, *Social studies may be defined as a dynamic, systematic and integrated discipline for generating knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary for dealing with contemporary life issues as well as for the understanding of man and the factors which influence his relationship with himself and his environment, in a sustainable manner.*

Inclusion to be Made into Social Studies

To deal with the issues of contemporary life earlier mentioned, innovative study fields should be included in the social studies curriculum package. The notable ones are peace education, community education, education for working life, daily living skills, international education, political education, as well as population and family life education amongst others. For a detailed discussion on these, see Lewy (1991:765-831)

Every community needs people who will not only identify with it but also be active participants in its development efforts. Community education, according to Newman (1975) entails not only the numerous ways of teaching youth about community life but also efforts in community development, citizenship etc. In the view of Bosah (1988), community education recognizes:

- An individual's potential for self determination;
- The need for the unification of individuals in communities for development;
- The value of needs identification and programme development for their attainment;
- The need to educate everyone in the community - children, adolescents, and adults alike, in and out of school;
- The need to link the schools and community in a healthy symbiotic relationship;
- The desirability of generating community participation in issues of interest to it; and
- The developmental advantage of realizing leadership potentials in members of a community in all spheres of life.

It has been recommended that the 6-3-3-4 and the UBE programmes should reflect community education ideals (Okam, 2001; Okam and Bozimo, 2001).

With inter - and intra - communal clashes becoming common features in the Nigerian socio-political scene, doses of peace education would be inevitable at this stage of our political development. Peace education is a life-long process which inculcates in the individual, a knowledge of the dangers posed to human life and human social life by war, violence, poverty and oppression (Wulf, 1974). It helps to foster peace, dialogue, unity, respect for and consideration of others (Edozie, 1999). It is an antidote for marginalization, neglect/exclusion, exploitation and conflicts. It espouses conflict as a dynamic phenomenon which consists of five stages namely: Initiation, escalation, controlled maintenance, abatement, and termination/resolution (Sandole, 1993). It teaches the skill for conflict resolution, transformation and management.

Education for working life, according to Dror (1991) refers to courses which focus on knowledge skills and predisposition which are considered to help graduates succeed in their occupational careers, gain satisfaction and self fulfillment in work taken on in their adult lives. It simply prepares them for the challenges ahead in the work place or career. Daily living skills include those competencies, which are commonly used in day to day life (Rich, 1991), They are the capabilities, which are necessary for functioning effectively both at home, and society. Population education, as well as environmental education will enhance the overall quality of life of recipients in a sustainable manner. International education is aimed at promoting international understanding, cooperation and integrating. Products of the UBE would be able to appreciate population, family, environmental and global events,

Refocusing Social Studies Curriculum

Some innovative study areas have been recommended for inclusion into the social studies curriculum to make it focused and relevant to contemporary life issues. For any curriculum to become an effective improvement of an existing practice it must take with the school and become fully institutionalized (Hoyle, 1977). According to him genuine innovation does not occur unless teachers

become personally committed to ensuring its success. This point has been underscored by McGeown {1980} who noted that teachers change-related values and their perceptions of innovation characteristics have a significant independent influence on their predisposition to adopt innovations. As UNESCO observed in 1970, there is practically complete agreement in theory on the view that great changes are inevitable, but in practice, very positive innovation encounters the most rigorous opposition. Education is a realm of tradition and resistance to change .springs up in the most varied quarters, ranging from teachers themselves, (the administration, the parents, the pupils and students, to political, professional, confessional, and cultural circles. Several countries note that socio-psychological resistance to reform is the major problem, perhaps more stubborn than the financial problem itself.

In Nigeria, teachers' resistance to Modern Mathematics has been documented by Adejumo (1988), Blakemore and Cooksey (1981) and to French Language by Obanya (1974), and Ndolcree (1973); and also to mother-tongue instruction by Emenanjo (1992). In Britain, United States and other western nations, Essen (1984) and Umoh (1986) have documented the violent resistance against the introduction of sex education in the school curricula.

Teachers do not always resist change and innovation. Olaogun's (1991) investigation of social studies teachers' receptivity of the new national Junior Secondary School social studies curriculum in Oyo State showed that they overwhelmingly received it. Edozie (2000) in a study of teachers' attitude to population education also found that they were favourably disposed to the introduction in school.

The introduction of social studies in Sierra Leone is quite instructive for a.s Adams (1970) noted curricula or method innovation invariably founder because they are formulated in vacua by curriculum development experts and then imposed on schools where unprepared teachers with neither the inclination or the knowledge to implement them make impolite remarks and label the innovations as burdensome. He stressed that educational change can only succeed when teachers are sufficiently impressed by the validity of the new approach and thoroughly grounded in the techniques necessary for their implementation.

Based on this premise, therefore to re focus social studies for a functional UBE, the following suggestions should be given consideration.

1. Needs assessment studies should be carried out across the country as a backup for the on-going policy dialogue and off-scheme mobilization for the UBE implementation, this is not only intended to identify the needs, values and aspirations of different parts of the country but to also different issues of contemporary life.
 2. Innovative study fields which address such needs and aspirations and their possible 'carriers' must be identified. Carrier subjects are subject disciplines that have modules or components that are closely related to the innovative study fields. Social studies, for example, is a favourable carrier for peace education, community education, international education, education for working life, population and family life education and so on.
 3. Binnis, Bennet, Chin, and Corey's (1976) rational empirical as well as their normative re-educative strategies should be followed. The rational empirical strategy entails using evidence of basic research to show clear rational justification for an innovation. The normative re-educative strategy entails not only familiarizing the users (teachers) with the innovation but also involving them in a number of tasks such as planning, trying - out, assessing, and reconstructing curricula. This should be blended with Havelock's (1973) research, development and diffusion (RD&D), and problem solving models which also allow the participation of a broad spectrum of curriculum actors, including teachers.
 4. Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) in collaboration with National Universities Commission (NUC), National Commission of Colleges of Education (NCCE), National Teacher's Institute (NTI), Universal Basic Education Commission UBEC) and Social Studies Association of Nigeria (SOSAN) would need to produce draft content of enriched social studies curriculum at all levels and determine training needs of teachers through baseline studies.
 5. Draft curriculum materials should also be developed and these should include textual materials, teachers' guides and instructional aids.
0. It should be decided whether implementation would be by the system wide approach, sequential approach or incremental approach. The incremental approach entails the introduction of the innovated curricula in a few schools, usually referred to as pilot schools, until it is gradually extended to more schools. The system - wide approach entails the simultaneous introduction of the innovated social studies curriculum throughout the educational system. The sequential approach focuses attention initially on just one level of the educational system for

example, primary and secondary or tertiary level) and over period of time, it is extended to other levels in sequence either up or down the academic ladder. This decision should be backed by a clear and well -- articulated policy statement by the federal and state governments.

7. Consultative meetings should be held with stakeholders in education, including grassroots organizations, local education authorities; government and international agencies. NUT, national parents teachers association and so on. Massive sensitization programmes at various levels should follow this.
8. Experts in those innovative fields should train master-trainers. Prototype materials and approaches should be re -evaluated. These master trainers will in turn train the relevant teaching and inspectorate staff.
9. Research grants should be made available to further knowledge in those fields and to monitor implementation.
10. Journals, books, periodicals should be commissioned to publish research findings. Conferences, workshops, refresher courses, and seminars should be sponsored. SOSAN conferences and journals should be arrowheads and beneficiaries in this regard.

Conclusion

Education is a cornerstone of economic growth, social development, and a principal means of not only improving the well-being of individuals but also increasing the productive capacity of any nation. The introduction of the UBE which makes education free and compulsory at the fundamental stages of schooling is therefore both timely and a step in the right direction. However, a comprehensive school curriculum, which meets the aspiration of individual and society, is what the UBE programme needs to make it functional. The inclusion of innovative study fields to enrich the present Social Studies curriculum is inevitable. In doing this, however, care must be taken to ensure that laid down procedures for curriculum implementation are followed. This way, all stakeholders in education would be carried along and any form of resistance would be moderated. Teachers, the fulcrum upon which the success or failure of any educational programme rests, must be active participants in the design, development and implementation of the enriched Social Studies Curriculum.

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