

IMPROVING SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM FOR POVERTY ERADICATION, SELF-RELIANCE AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Social Studies is a core subject at various educational levels in Nigeria. It is more pronounced from nursery to junior secondary schools, while it is completely absent at the senior secondary school level in Nigeria. The need to introduce this subject at this level cannot be over stressed. This paper examines Social Studies education; need to re-generate issues such as curriculum review, syllabus, bridging the gap between JSS1 – 3 & SS1 – 3, democratization of teaching methods, strategies, techniques, issues of national integration and structural realignment for poverty eradication, self-reliance and national development. Recommendations were also made.

The curriculum is the operational medium that enables the school to fulfill the various expectations of society. It is the planned and unplanned learning experiences in or outside the school for which the school accepts responsibility. The curriculum gives direction and guidance to all activities carried out in the educational system. Today, more than ever before, society seeks accountability from the educational system. This is not unconnected with the process of globalization which is turning the entire universe into a global village. Globalization has manifested itself in every sphere of life and in relationships among nations irrespective of their location on earth or boundaries that lie between them. Thus, human living is being played out in the globe as a single entity. This process has been enhanced by the advancement in communication and technology. Nigeria is a part of the world family and is often referred to as the giant of Africa. As a nation, she has endorsed education as an instrument “par excellence” for effecting national growth and development. Social Studies is a core subject taught at the junior secondary school (JSS), which contributes towards achieving the goals of education. As a subject area, it uses its curriculum to build individuals who are capable of making informed and rational decisions for the common good of a culturally inter-dependent world.

Concept of Social Studies

Social Studies now occupies a definitive and respectable place in the curriculum of both primary and junior secondary schools in Nigeria. The current eminence of the subject could be attributed to the realization that unlike other school subjects, Social Studies focuses primarily on learning the physical and social realities that surround man. Mansaray (2001) opined that Social Studies is, arguably, the most integrated of all school subjects at the primary and secondary school levels. This is so because it is only by deriving and integrating its content from a variety of discipline that Social Studies can attempt to foster this understanding. As a concept, social studies is that discipline that deals with the study of man in his environment. It deals with man’s interaction with his physical, social, economic, cultural, religious, scientific and technological environment. It is concerned on one hand with the reciprocal relationship between man and his environment. It is a discipline that is concerned with the “realities” of our existence and man’s interactions with his social environment.

As a school subject it is designed to foster in learners, a better understanding of man’s interactions with his physical and social environments. (Mansaray, 1991), Social Studies can be said to have reached maturity, yet it remains perhaps, the least understood and most objected subject on the school timetable, especially by teachers of the other more traditional subjects. The broad-based nature of social studies makes it the most appropriate school subject in the Nigerian school curriculum to meet many of the demands of education for a sustainable, enduring and democratic future. Social Studies is the school subject contrived to foster deeper understanding in young learners of the intricacies of the realities of man’s existence and provides them with the necessary knowledge, skills, values and attributes to better cope with and possibly, influence these realities. Therefore, as a school

subject, it is not only concerned with cognitive development (although this constitutes an important part of the aims of the programme) but also concerned with shaping behaviour, attitude and value orientations of the pupils in the direction of what society considers as desirable for its democratic sustenance and progress. Thus, it is referred to as a way of life.

Concept of Social Studies Curriculum

According to Akilaye, Ayedele, Bolarin and Olaniyonu (1997), Social Studies curriculum is concerned with what is planned, programme selected, provided and guided by the culture, experiences and knowledge of the society for the individual learners in the nation's schools. It should be noted that the needs, values, aspirations, traditions, norms, wants, desires, demands, and cultures are different among the different types of people all over the world. Social Studies curriculum provides an essential link between (a) society's aspirations and accomplishment, (b) educational thought and practice and (c) teachers and child curiosity. Akinlaye (1997) viewed Social Studies curriculum as an educational programme which embraces knowledge, methods, resources, evaluation and societal experiences offered to the learners, in an effort to promote effective democratic values and skills for effective citizenship.

Self-Reliance

Self-reliance concerns the ability to do or decide things by oneself rather than depending on other people for help. It carries the notions of independence and self-sufficiency which is a state of not requiring any outside aid, support, or (in extreme cases) interaction, for survival. It is therefore a type of extreme personal or collective (group-based) autonomy. Self-reliance also connotes self-direction which is the ability to propel oneself toward a particular direction.

The Concept of Poverty in Nigeria

Poverty is a social malaise which is precipitated by the incapacity of a state to carry out its functions and the unresponsiveness of the government to the economic and social conditions of the people. Poverty has been defined variously by various specialists. For example, Dewit (2000), defined it as a terrible living condition in which one cannot afford the basic things of life such as good feeding, accommodation and clothing.

Furthermore, Abraham (2002) also defined poverty as a pathetic life situation in which a person lives from hands to mouth, and as a result either finds it difficult to eat three square meals a day or eats whatever is available to him. In Nigeria where about 30% of the population lives on less than one US Dollar a day is an issue for concern. This is because poverty can do a great damage to the development of a viable workforce which has often been considered as a great asset to nation building and a sustainable economic development in any country.

Other African countries whose citizens also live below one US Dollar per day include; South Africa 23.7%, Botswana 34.7%, Lesotho 50.4%, Zambia 84.6%, Niger 61.5%, Ghana 40%, Mali 52%, North African countries tend to do better in relation to the incidence of poverty. Some of the countries whose population lives below one US Dollar include Egypt 7.6%, Algeria 1.6% and Tunisia 3.9% (UNESCO, 2000).

From all the various definitions advanced above, it could be deduced that poverty is a pathetic socio-economic situation in which a person finds it difficult to acquire the essential things of life that can keep body and soul together. By extension, poverty could be viewed as inability to fulfill economic and social life aspirations and ambitions.

Social Studies Education

Series of definitions have been given to what social studies is. People should be conscious of the fact that social studies covers a wide range of studies since it takes and uses concepts, ideas, skills, knowledge, attitudes and values from the social science subjects like geography, government,

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economics, religion, sociology and a host of others (Fadelye 2005). Therefore, there is no single definition of social studies that is universally accepted.

Fadeiye (2006) defined it as the study of man, as he interacts with his different environment. This environment could be physical, social, political, economic or cultural environments. It is also the study of how man influences his environment with a view to getting maximum benefits from it. The subject also deals with how the environment influences man in return. Social Studies has also been described as a way of life, as it touches on all spheres of human endeavour. Social Studies also describe how man tries to solve the problems of survival in whatever environment man finds himself. It also studies the society, the relationships between people and the world in which they live. Awe (1976) saw Social Studies as a problem-solving discipline. She declared that:

Social Studies as a discipline if properly programmed and effectively taught should help to solve social problems that are facing developing countries like Nigeria where the old norms are fast losing their grounds and there are no effective substitutes to replace them.

National Education Research Council (1980), defined Social Studies as a way of seeing, viewing and approaching things with special regard to their proper place and function in the ordering and management of man's total, natural, social and technological environments (CESAC 1979), defined Social Studies as a relationship between science and technology.

In order to achieve the overall success of Social Studies, Dubey (1980) identified the following as the objectives of the subject.

1. The development of good citizenship, the up-liftment of character and the promotion of social understanding in the societies.
2. The promotion of national unity and economic development.
3. Preparing students for the world of work and understanding of everyday problems that they may face as adults.
4. The development of critical thinking, problem solving and decision making for the survival and progress of the nation.
5. Enhancing socialization and acculturation of citizens in the society.

In general, Social Studies education aspires to achieve humanistic citizenship and value education. These objectives are geared toward the reduction of the complexity of the environment and the necessity of constant learning.

In order words, Social Studies education makes efforts to involve a consciousness in the citizenry at all levels of the society, which will inculcate in them the virtues of self-regulation, rediscovery of the meaning of duty and to accept responsibility, pursue honest endeavours through dedication and hard work. The overall goal of this type of education is the inculcation of values, habits and orientation which will lead without force to the realization of a great, self-reliant society in which justice, democratic change, responsibilities and tolerance shall prevail (Danladi, 2005).

Fadeiye (2005) affirmed that; Social Studies enables its learners to understand their environments in all their ramifications. When people understand their environment, they will be able to solve the problems of survival in such an environment and equally live comfortably there. According to him, social studies emphasizes discovery, dialogue, and experiences. It gives the learners the ample chance of discovering things for themselves by experiment or through dialogue and experience. This explains the reason why social studies uses methods such as inquiry method, problem solving method, excursion, questioning technique, discussion methods and creative activity method through which pupils or students can discover things too by themselves.

Social Studies will help to achieve the goal of building a united, viable and prosperous Nigeria since the subjects seek to achieve national unity and national survival. In Social Studies, we

learn about the cultural aspects of different groups in Nigeria. One of the major problems facing Nigeria since independence is the absence of national unity. When Nigerians understand and appreciate their differences, develop genuine cooperation and a high sense of commitment to nation building, they will be able to promote the unity of the country. Also in a situation where Nigeria is plagued with social problems and indiscipline among adults and the youth, social studies is essential to build a strong and united nation by combating the social vices.

Improving Social Studies Curriculum for Poverty Eradication Self-Reliance and National Development

Social Studies curriculum has been reviewed several times to meet the needs of the citizens. This review will surely continue since the need of man is dynamic in nature. There is therefore, the need to refocus Social studies curriculum for globalization and for a radical shift from the present perception of Social Studies education. For instance, as Castella (2010) pointed out, Social Studies must produce new mode of knowledge through the distillation of new global theories and techniques involved in information retrieval.

The focus of globalization from social studies perspective should center on human resource capacity empowerment. It is only an objective and refined labour that can make the new information technology productive.

Social Studies curriculum has to be re-designed to accommodate such global and value system as, hunger, hatred, diseases, transportation, communication and many others to contend with. The present deficiency of Social Studies curriculum at school level to face the new challenges of globalization must be addressed urgently. This could be pursued through the revitalization of the Social Studies teacher to adopt the “Social Action” approach toward the inculcation of the contents of Social Studies education. This approach calls for a re-socialization of Social Studies teachers who constitute a vital element in curriculum design and development. This is the time to face national realities for effective development and progress of mankind in national and international interactions.

For instance, there is urgent need for social studies curriculum experts to review the subject curriculum to meet the international standard. In line with this review, there is need to put in place syllabus for senior secondary schools to cater for SS 1–3. This is long overdue. Presently, Social studies curriculum or syllabus, right from nursery schools to Junior Secondary Schools. We also run this subject at the College of Education and Universities in Nigeria. Why can't bridge the gap between junior secondary schools (JSS) and higher institutions of learning mentioned above with syllabus the for senior secondary school level? This will enable students to register for the subject at WASCE. This will allow free flow of the subject from the nursery, primary, junior secondary schools, senior secondary, colleges of education and to the university. This is long overdue for consideration.

If Nigeria is to have an enduring and sustainable democratic governance, the primary social studies curriculum must take a cue from Portugal, U.S and Britain by including not only democratic values and principles in the curriculum but also adopting a state political ideology as opined by Laoye (2004), when he asked what political ideology did for the present policy on education.

According to Sousa (2004), the Portuguese people should have the right to education and culture. The reality of this intention is seen in the school rates, illiteracy rate, length of compulsory education and the like. The Universal Basic Education Programme introduced recently is a welcome idea with well-stated and achievable aims and objectives. For the goals of the programme to be achieved it must be ensured that the compulsory aspect is effectively and efficiently implemented so that a child will have nothing less than Nine (9) years to imbibe all the necessary democratic values and principles. The nine year school period will be enough to inculcate necessary state political ideology, political culture and socialization.

The primary Social Studies curriculum should be organized in such a way as to make young learners realize that facts, ideas, information, issues and even generalizations do not themselves

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constitute the content and learning experiences to be taught, but value by which positive effects, ideas, attitudes relating to governance, democracy, political culture, socialization, political consciousness and national unity are to be developed, acquired and internalized by pupils from the early stages of their lives. The curriculum orientation should offer meaningful, purposeful, significant and be relevant to instructional strategies to teach the democratic values and principles. The primary social studies curriculum must be designed to facilitate organization of pupils' experiences to promote coherence and growth to enable them relate their experiences in social studies activities to other areas of experience in the society such as governance.

Furthermore, the learning experience and content of the curriculum should be structured in such a way that it will be elastic so as to accommodate the thrust of the society in the areas of knowledge and experience on national issues such as governance and so on.

Conclusion

There are many emerging issues in social studies education. This paper is of the opinion that these issues can be tackled using the teaching of social studies as a subject. These emerging issues are surmountable if one applies the right remedy and at the right time. And this is the right time if one wants real development to take place in the country.

Recommendations

No paper written on emerging issues in social studies can go without recommendations. Below are some recommendations.

1. There should be an urgent social studies curriculum review by the stakeholders at all levels to reflect pressing problems in Nigeria.
2. There is need to urgently consider the introduction of social studies as a subject at the senior secondary school level of the educational system in Nigeria. This will bridge the gap between the JSS and SSS levels of education in Nigeria.
3. Social studies education should be made compulsory from primary school to junior secondary schools (JSS 1-3).
4. Refresher courses should be given to teachers of social studies at all levels.
5. Government should establish social studies workshops at all tertiary institutions where they are not available.

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