EFFECTIVE CITIZENSHIP THROUGH SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION FOR DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA BEYOND 2020

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Abstract

Social studies is sine-guennon to building a well informed and effective citizenry who are useful to themselves and the society they find themselves. Social studies education touches on all aspects of societal, development, be it political, economic, social, cultural, technological or educational. This may be the reason why it is referred to as a way of life. By its interdisciplinary character, Social Studies education develop in the minds of students the basic knowledge and ways of thinking that prepare them to participate in civic and community life as active and informed citizens. This paper examined the place of Social Studies education in promoting effective citizenship for development in Nigeria. The paper discussed the concepts of effective citizenship, Social Studies, and development. The paper also attempted to establish the relationship between social studies and effective citizenship. Finally recommendations were proffered and the paper concluded.

Since Nigerian was birthed in 1914 over one hundred years ago, one area of social living that has been torn by perpetual strife is the peoples social life. The emergence of Nigeria as a geo-polity has its concomitants. These include: the bringing together of 619 independent ethnic groups. Which Omolewa in Meziobi describe as “…. Agglomeration of people distinct in every way except in the colour of their skins”. Both the majority and minority ethnic groups struggled and competed and are still struggling and competing for socio-political supremacy, empowerment and equality. The result has been social disequilibrium, social disorder and insecurity. (Mezieobi 2012).

The ultimate explanation for the endemic social leprosy in Nigeria is the total absence of desire able social values. It is so painful that many of the best minds are seized with despair because Nigeria is plagued by multi dimensional problems; problems which relegate the acquisition of effective citizenship for national development to the back ground.

A number of unwholesome behaviours exhibited by Nigerians negate the cultivation of the virtues enshrined in a commitment to acquisition of effective citizenship for national development. Corruption has permeated into the nations social
fibre to the extent that nothing works in the society except if a bribe is offered. Corruption, embezzlement, squandering of the national economy, political naivety, executive indiscipline are among the behaviours of Nigerians that negate national development. Other behaviours that negate effective citizenship and national development include cultism and ritual killings. These “negative citizenship” values have gravely militated against Nigerian’s march towards effective citizenship and sustained national development.

Amidst various reforms agenda, policies development plans and programmes is vision 2010 which targets to catapult Nigeria into the league of the first 20 global economies of the year 2020. To achieve this objective, Nigeria will have to compete vigorously with nations like US Japan, Germany, China and the United Kingdom, which have traditionally maintained the top five ranking of the international monetary fund (IMF). In order to achieve the ideals of vision 2020 therefore, the nation as a whole needs to make a shift in mind set and in thinking. This will begin with the schools at the kindergarten level. The development of human capital is the greatest challenge facing vision 2020 and breading effective citizenry is the only way to achieving vision 2020.

Attainment of effective citizenship through Social Studies education is the foundation of every promising and purposeful society. This is indeed the basic requirement for sustainable National integration and development. Even though developing good citizens is the principal goal of Social Studies, the attainment of this goal is by no means an easy or clear-cut task, not least because, beyond the rhetorical consensus about the major goal of Social Studies, there has been little debate about the relationship between Social Studies and effective citizenship.

Social Studies has been identified as a potent instrument that can facilitate the attainment of national development goals through the production of responsible citizens that will contribute maximally to the growth of the society. This can be seen from the citizens’ behavioral disposition which may include honesty, dedication, forthrightness, handwork, endurance, productivity, perseverance and self reliance.

The Social Studies curriculum is unified by its purpose and goals and all of the components of such a curriculum—not only its contents, but its instructional approaches, learning activities and evaluation techniques are included in the curriculum because they are viewed as means for helping students to acquire important capabilities and dispositions. The point should be reiterated that the capacity of Social Studies education to deliver effective citizenship education is not based solely on the curriculum but, equally, on the teaching strategies employed.
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The burden of this paper therefore is to lay bare the relationship between Social Studies and effective citizenship and how it can be achieved through the instrumentality of effective Social Studies teaching and learning for development in Nigeria beyond 2020.

Clarification Concepts

Mezieobi (2014) stressed the indispensability of clarifying concepts when he opined that it is an inevitable pre-condition or concomitant of a discourse to clarify concepts as it makes for easy understanding of the dyad communication and to know from where the “communicator is coming” In this vein, three concepts viz: social studies, effective citizenship and development, need to be briefly defined.

The Concept of Social Studies

Social studies is not just a discipline that periscopes man in his environment but also a problem-solving field of study According to Kadiri (2004), as quoted in Tanko (2004)

“Social Studies in an integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Within the school programmes social studies provides such discipline as anthropology, economics geography, history, law, political science, religion as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics and natural science. The purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse democratic society in an interdependent world”.

The Terminology: Effective Citizenship: This is perceived as the totality of adequate human abilities, desirable behaviors and actions, attitudes and values such as responsibility, accountability, discipline, trustworthiness, genuineness, integrity, compassion, kindness, tolerance and consideration among others which are exhibited individually or collectively in a social group in their interrelationships for the ultimate good of all.

The Concept of Development

Development implies improvement which takes place in society and bring about positive changes, politically, economically, socially educationally among other sectors of life.

Ekuafe in Ololobou (2004) viewed development as “improvement in quality of life. It encompasses as ends in themselves better education, higher standards of health and nutrition, less poverty, a cleaner environment, more equality of opportunity, greater individual freedom and a richer cultural life”.

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Promoting Effective Citizenship through Social Studies for Development

The development of effective citizenship in the Nigerian citizenry is the centre of every social studies programme. An in-depth analysis and review of social studies education around the world revealed that despite the turmoil in social studies, there is a general agreement among academics about what the essential goals and especially the overarching goal of social studies ought to be. Similarity, American Education Reach Out (AERO) (2008) has observed that “for all the arguments, convention speeches and journal articles, it seems clear that the term citizenship education lies at the heart of Social Studies”.

One of the main ways Social Studies can achieve the goal of citizenship education is through the creation of well-informed or knowledgeable citizens. The type of knowledge offered by Social Studies is distinct from that provided by other subject areas in that it fusses, in an integrated manner, especially on knowledge of social and economic issues and of events taking place in the society. By drawing strategically from the social sciences and the humanities, Social Studies is able to impart to the student on knowledge which is relevant to his or her socio-economic context and, at the same time, use the dynamic of change implicit in the construction of knowledge to bring meaningful analysis to social and economic issues.

Another major way in which Social Studies can achieve the goal of citizenship education is by helping student to acquire the skills of (thinking/cognitive, study/academic, political, economic and interpersonal/social) necessary for functioning in today’s increasingly complex and global environment. However, Eagle and Ochoa (1988) stated that citizens in a democracy require more complex skills than these skills including map reading skills, library skills, communication skills, and group work skills which are usually listed for Social Studies. These limited skills, they observed are primarily concerned with retrieval and re-call of information whereas the skills required by a citizen in a democracy focus on the utilization of knowledge in making decisions and implementing one’s decision in the socio-economic and political area. The specific skills which they see as being important for effective citizenship include:

i. Being able to size up a problem and identify the real point of conflict or the real issues including the underlying values that are at stake.

ii. Being able to select the information which is relevant to the problem and to relate it logically to proposed solutions; being able to judge the reliability of various sources of information including firsthand experience as well as research-based information.

iii. Being able to see a problem in its broadest possible context including the value consideration involved.

iv. Being able to build a scenario of likely consequences regarding any proposed solution to a problem
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v. Being to make reasoned judgment’s where the evidence is conflicting or where there is conflict between desired values.

vi. Being able to empathize with people whose points of view with respect to the problem differ from yours.

vii. Being able to choose a solution which, though less than ideal, is politically viable and makes progress towards resolving in impasse possible.

viii. Being able to exercise political influence toward implementing justifiable decisions; being able to organize others and to work in organizations to achieve justifiable political goals.

Effective citizenship can mean self development with a view to becoming better prepared to make positive contributions to the society. It also implies the appreciation of the values of the differences and the dynamism of the diversity as a means to contribute towards the overall growth of the society. To contribute worthily to the growth of the society as responsible citizens, Alberta Learning (2000) advocated for the acquisition of basic knowledge, and skills and positive attitudes as fundamental re-acquirement. Such skills and knowledge should equip the citizens with the talent of engaging in productive activities that will contribute to national development. The hallmark of any national development effort is seriously dependent on how responsible the citizens are (Bette and Nakanda 2012).

Conclusion

Social studies programmes provide a moral basis for values reorientation for the good conduct of individuals and groups in the society. It provides useful and valuable knowledge about the country. It exposes students to the political realities of our times and land, including ethnic and religious/political problems and what efforts are being made to solve them. It also equips citizens with awareness about the economy and types of governments, the successes and failures of past regimes whether civilian or military. It guides inter-relationships, thereby promoting the achievement of the ultimate goal of Social Studies which is the production of effective citizens.

Recommendations

Since the introduction of the teaching of social studies in Nigerian schools in the 70’s, the main philosophy behind the teaching/learning of the subject in institutions is geared at producing effective citizens that would create the basis for forging a cohesive society that would support a notion of nation-building and national development.

However, despite the acceptance of Social Studies by Nigerian educators as curriculum instrument for building and growing effective citizens, many researchers reveal that this noble objective is yet to be achieved in various schools and colleges (Okam 2012, Mezobi 2014, Umar 2007), these researches generally endorse that
teachers are largely responsible for the ugly situation in schools and colleges about the issues that impinge on the problem of achieving effectiveness in the employment of the curriculum design intrinsic in social studies. No matter the relevance of the curriculum content injected in the planned social studies programme in Nigeria, the subject can only have the desired meaning if the social studies teachers generates as many values as possible from it and infact, “distill from every learning content the appropriate affective (values) learning which constitute the essence of the contents” (Mkpa 1997 in Mezieobi 2014).

The essence of knowledge acquisition is to help or guide learners acquire relevant funds of utilizable knowledge that can be applied in real life setting to solve societal problems through the use of “Solomonic Wisdom” (Mezieobi 2014) and the intellectual skills which the Social Studies learner has been endorsed with by his exposure to Social Studies contents.

It need be reiterated that knowledge acquisition in Social Studies is not just sheer teachers dispensing of knowledge to passive learners. It should be a product of “reasonable democratized collaborative learning atmosphere in which the learners are actively participating”. (Mezieobi, Fabura and Meziobi 2013).

Social studies in not just an embodiment of effective citizenship. It is the entrencher of effective citizenship to its “educational customers” (Mezieobi 2014) if appropriately taught.

References


