

NATURE AND SCOPE OF SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

There has been various misconceptions about the meaning, nature and scope of social studies education. There is also different perceptions of the nature of social studies because of the varying cultural and environmental setting of man and this differs from country to country. Social studies is a corrective study because it is a subject which is concern with the problems of man's living in the society with a view of finding solutions to those problems. It is also a subject which concentrates on the three (3) areas of knowledge, cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains. It is not easy to have a generally acceptable definition of social studies. This is because of its relative nature in terms of location, time, circumstance and the individual scholar defining it. It is against this background, that this paper focuses attention on the nature of social studies, scope of social studies, objectives of social studies, expanding horizon of social studies and how social studies education contribute to national development. Finally conclusions and recommendations are made.

Social studies is the study of man and his physical, social, political, cultural and economical environment. It centres on the development of man, how man influences his environment and how the environment influences him in return. Kisko an American in 1981 who worked in Nigeria in the 1920's defined social studies as "a programme of study which society uses to instill in students the knowledge, skills, values, attitude and actions it considers important, concerning the relationships human beings have with each other, their world and themselves". Social studies focused on man and his interactions with his environment. It also keeps on changing because of the factors of time and human development. It fights against evil vices in the society. The subject considers peculiar problems of a country and finds solutions to those problems. As such the objective of Nigerian social studies must reflect the spirit of Nigerian philosophy of education. It must help to develop the capacity to learn and to acquire certain basic skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing and calculation. Social studies education focuses on the use of critical and reflective thinking to solve the problems of man's survival in the environment.

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Nature of Social Studies Education

Edgar Wesley (1938) was the first man to use the social studies for pedagogical purposes in the United States of America after the depression years and the appearance of the Soviet Ssputnik. To him the new social studies was a programme meant to lead the boys and girls to find excitement and motivation in the process of social education via exploration, inquiry and discovery but with emphasis on developing competencies, values and attitudes essential for citizens in a free society. With time American social studies has evolved to prepare young Americans for future wars and to promote the spirit of nationalism, patriotism and loyalty to sensitize the youth on the concepts of self-reliance in food, resources conservation and increased productivity. Adeyoyin (1977) came out with five (5) different definitions of social studies as “A spiral ecological study of man which starts from the self to family, hamlet, village, town, district, local government area, state, country, continent and the world at large.

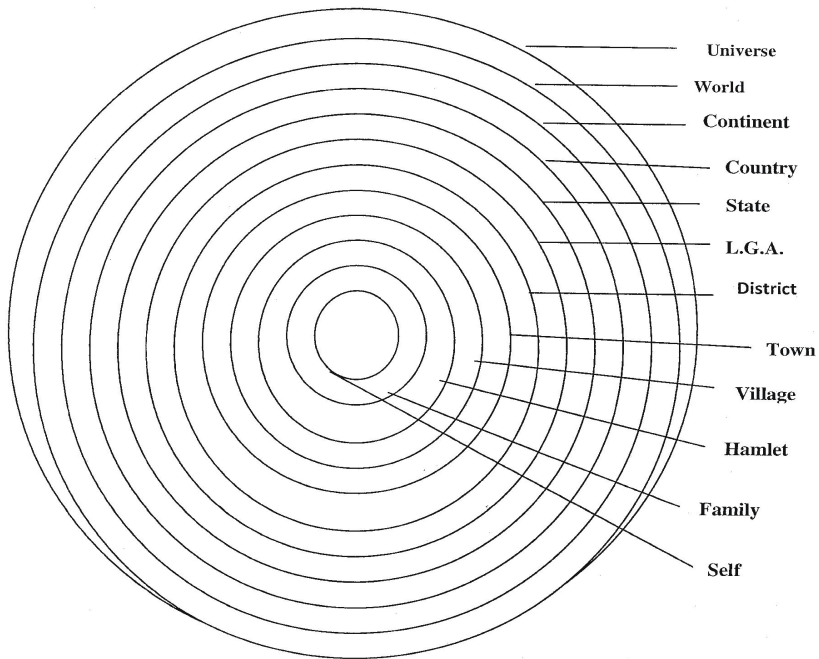


Fig. I. A spiral Ecological study

Source: Adeyoyin (1977)

Many people today often get confused on the nature of social studies in our schools and colleges. The subject is relatively new in the school curriculum. It is a corrective study because it is a subject which is concern with the problems of man’s

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living in the society with a view of finding solutions to those problems. It is also a subject which concentrate on the three (3) areas of knowledge, cognitive, affective and psychomotor domain. Only few people think of the subject in a single form in USA, this is because many authorities see social studies as a plural subject. Ololobou (1989) conceptualized social studies as “An organized, integrated study of man and his environment, both physical and social, emphasizing on cognition functional skills and desirable attitudes and actions for the purpose of producing an effective citizenry”.

The Traditional Subject Specialists See Social Studies in the Following Ways:

- (a) As a combination of selected aspects of social sciences without each of these different subjects necessarily losing their identity.
- (b) As a replacement of the traditional subjects which constitute the humanities and the social sciences.
- (c) As a distinct subject meant to displace or substitute for history and other traditional subject in the humanity and social sciences in the school curriculum. It is because of this that there was a continuous resistance of the traditional subject specialist to the introduction of social studies into the school curricula. According to the nature of social studies education, the subject has three (3) general perspectives:

The Unidisciplinary Perspective

This is a separate subject approach which sees social studies as a combination of history, geography, economics, sociology, psychology, anthropology named among others. With this perspective, a time table is planned in the school in such a way that scholars or specialists in these subjects can come at different times in the day to teach the pupils or students content materials in the name of social studies. This approach is preferred by traditional teachers who have soft spot for social studies education as it is less of a problem for them as it does not require the integration of forms of knowledge. Besides, the approach assures them of the continuity of their subject and job opportunity. However, the proponents of this perspective forget that life situation or experiences is not organized into component parts or subject compartments.

Pupils or students do not think in terms of subjects but they learn in wholes and not discrete bits. Infact, solutions to societal problems are not sought through the aid of separate subjects.

The Multidisciplinary Perspective

This is where concepts (words) and content materials from more than one discipline or subject are taken and taught by one teacher for example.

- (a) Origin of our community (History)
- (b) Location of our community (Geography)

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- (c) Resources in our community (Economics)
- (d) Different groups in our community (Sociology)
- (e) Interpersonal relationships in our community (Psychology)
- (f) Development of certain tools in our community (Anthropology).

The Interdisciplinary Perspective

This is sometimes called the unified approach or integrated approach which blends the contents of social studies and it is difficult to distinguish the original disciplines or subject responsible for them. In this approach issues like family, local community development, nation building, justice, freedom, equality, democracy, air pollution, urbanization, globalization to name a few are presented and discussed. Another example is the concept of “power” which can be developed throughout the primary school levels thus:-

Primary 1 – Power relationship in the family.

Primary 2 - Power relationship in the school.

Primary 3 - Power relationship in the local community.

Primary 4 - Power relationship in the state.

Primary 5 - Power relationship in the country.

Primary 6 - Power relationship in the continent of Africa.

Scope of Social Studies Education

Social studies is not static, it keeps on changing because of the factors of time and human development. It centres on the development of man, how man influences his environment and how the environment influences him in return. The subject exposes the child to problems of the society and how to solve those problems. The problems of the society include the following:

1. Bribery and corruption.
2. Religious fanaticism
3. Tribalism
4. Greediness.
5. Dishonesty
6. Distrust
7. Stealing
8. Smuggling.
9. Child trafficking
10. Laziness
11. Moral laxity.
12. Drug abuse
13. Prostitution
14. Food shortage etc.

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It is against this background that social studies will equip the child with the basic social habits and cultural values which will enable him to build a good society in the future. Social studies deals with the activities of man at home, in the family, in the village, in the school, at play, in politics, at work, in religion, in everything or wherever man is engaged in his efforts to survive in the environment in which he lives.

Objectives of Social Studies Education

The goals and objectives of social studies education vary from society to society. Social studies curriculum for Nigeria should consider the peculiar problems of the country. The most serious problem facing Nigeria today is the problems of unity. As such the social studies programme should be planned in order to urge Nigerians to do things that will foster unity, peace and the development of the country.

The objectives of Nigerian social studies which are developed to reflect the spirit of Nigerian philosophy of education, lay emphasis on the integration of Nigerian citizens into sound and effective citizens. The national educational aims an objective from which social studies objective are drawn are stated in the National Policy of Education (2009:4). They are as follows-

1. The inculcation of national consciousness and national unity.
2. The inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes.
3. The training of the mind in the understanding of the world around.
4. The acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competencies necessary for the development of society.

Based on these national educational objectives, Nigerian social studies has developed some of the following objectives for teaching in the Nigerian schools.

1. To create an awareness and an understanding of our social and physical environment in order to conserve it for national development.
2. To develop a capacity to learn and acquire certain basic skills of literacy, numeracy and critical thinking essential to the forming of sound judgment concerning social, economic and political issues.
3. To teach the child to acquire a relevant body of knowledge and information necessary for personal development and contribution to the betterment of mankind.
4. To develop appreciation for the diverse nature and interdependence of Nigerian communities.
5. To develop in students, positive attitudes towards the spirit of friendliness and co-operation necessary for a healthy nation and to inculcate appropriate values of honesty, integrity, hardwork, fairness and justice.

With these social studies objectives reflecting the needs of the society, one easily understands the usefulness of social studies as a process of education which

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examines ways of working in the society in order to understand social problems and thereby seek solutions to them.

Social studies focus attention on the use of critical and reflective thinking to solve the problems of man's survival in the society e.g. a good citizen should be able to distinguish between facts from rumour or propaganda. Reflective inquiry is the ability to hypothesize, gather data, analyze, interpret, conclude and generalize based on collection of certain information or data.

To develop a capacity to learn and to acquire certain basic skills including not only those of listening, speaking, reading and writing and of calculation but also those of skills of hand and head, together with those of observation, analysis, and inferences which are essential to the forming of sound social economic and political judgment.

Students can learn by collecting data from say resource persons, analyze them and arrive at responsible conclusions. e.g. a problem related to the environment could be examined by going to resource persons within the community to collect data on its possible solutions. By so doing, pupils are being developed into effective citizens who are less likely to become victims or target of indoctrination. Since social studies focuses on the use of critical and reflective thinking to solve the problems of man's survival i.e. deals with how we can fit into the society by utilizing the necessary attitudes, values and skills. The teacher should be adequately familiar with the available instructional materials in social studies with emphasis on the relevant approach of problem-solving and evaluation of the attitudes, values and skills.

Expanding Horizon Pattern of Social Studies

From the expanding horizon pattern of social studies education, one can see that it starts from man as a central figure. Therefore all environmental influences are carefully arranged around him, which proceed from the home to the outside world.

Specific to general, from known to unknown and from simple to complex. Social studies gives the child the knowledge of immediate to remote and enable him to the internal and external implications of national and international systems. It makes him aware of the outside world, friendly and hostile forces which influences his life for better or for worse.

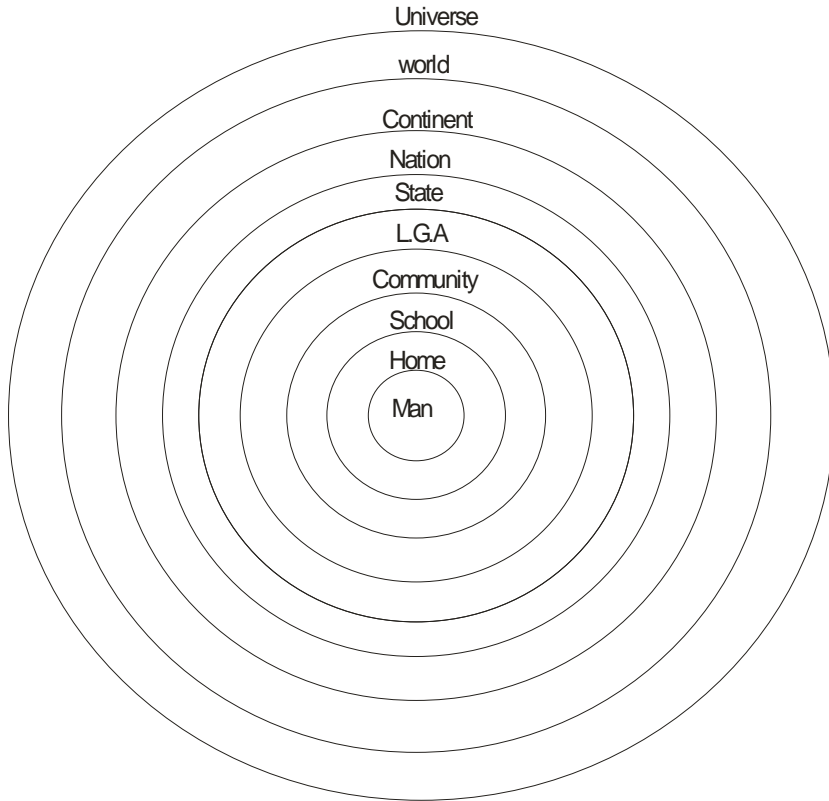


Fig. 2: Expanding Horizon of Social Studies.

Source: Adeyoyin (1981:54).

How Social Studies Education Contribute To National Development

Social studies as an interdisciplinary subject relies heavily on the content of social science and humanities to achieve the goals of preparing people to be good citizens of democracy. It links factors outside the individual, particularly the development and use of reflective thinking, problems solving, national decision making skills for the purpose of creating involvement in socialization.

Social studies as problems-solving subject was used in different parts of the world in solving specific problems and for development of nation. In Britain social, studies is used as a citizenship education, in United States of America, social studies is used to inculcate democratic values. In Tanzania, social studies is used for inculcation of the spirit of African Socialism. In Nigeria, according to Dubey (1980), it was to heal the

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wounds of the Nigerian civil war and inculcate the spirit of national consciousness, unity and patriotism.

With the knowledge of social studies education, the student avoid the practice of these bad vices like child trafficking, drug trafficking, prostitution, bribery and corruption etc and think positively and contribute to the development of the society.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to show that social studies is a corrective study because it is a subject which is concern with the problems of man's living in the society with a view of finding solutions to those problems. It centres on the development of man, how man influences his environment and how the environment influences him in return. The subject exposes the child to problems of the society and how to solve these problems like bribery and corruption, greediness, dishonesty, distrust, stealing etc.

Recommendations

1. Workshops, seminars and conferences should be organized from time to time for social studies teachers.
2. More funds should be provided so as to encourage the teaching of social studies.
3. There should be training and retraining of social studies teachers in social studies education, so as to make them competent in making appropriate choices of instructional materials to be used at a given time.
4. Teachers of social studies should be trained on how to improvise instructional materials so that all concepts taught in social studies could be done through the use of instructional materials.

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