

SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION AND SOCIAL ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN SOCIETY

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Abstract

Education has been internationally acclaimed as the only weapon that can make a nation move forward in the face of the current era of science and technology. This paper tries to look at Social Studies education and social issues in contemporary Nigeria society using environmental education as the major point for discussion. It examines the general oremen of contemporary issues in Nigerian society. It highlights the concept of Social Studies Education, Environmental Education as well as the Objectives of Environmental Education. This paper also highlights the relationship between man and his environment as well as how Social Studies and environmental education cannot be separated. Finally, recommendations and conclusions were made.

In our age, young people more than ever before have been afforded the advantage of a systematic education that has opened their minds to a vast array of facts ad notions about themselves and the physical world they live in. Contemporary education has a character that stresses experimental knowledge and the scientific method of investigation and verification (Osborne, 2004). This method of education has immensely broadened man's understanding of the universe. It has measured and harnessed nature's dynamic forces and bent them to the service of humanity, its needs, its comfort and its ambitions for a better world.

Twentieth-century Nigeria has witnessed a resurgence of certain social issues that were traditionally taken-for-granted. These issues, we refer to as contemporary issues; they are challenging the originally held views, and as a

result they need some review from time to time for a peaceful society. This is necessary because the twentieth century has witnessed accelerated technology, value shifts, and an enhanced educational opportunity for all. For the people, it is no longer a matter of settling down and looking at such issues, but that of studying them critically, and finding possible solutions to them. To neglect that would give rise to many social problems which will cost some people loss of identity, control and self respect in the society. It will cause uneasiness and discomfort to the public, Mezieobi, K. A. (1997).

Contemporary issues in Social Studies Education in Nigeria aims at organizing and treating some of such contemporary issues in modern Nigeria so as to help people to have a clear view of what is happening in the society and how it is affecting their lives. Contemporary issues differ from society to society and may change with time. It might last for a long or short time, but characteristically it must be causing the public some concern and its solution must bring happiness to the public. Such issues are always found in every democratic society though; they may differ from place to place for example, a contemporary issue in Nigeria may not be a contemporary issue in Ghana, (Uchendu, 1997). So issues are relative and one cannot outline all contemporary issues in the world because they differ from one place to another. Therefore social studies educators and students must always be at alert so as to be relevant in their

society or else they could not intervene meaningfully in individual and social life of the members of their society. For the purpose of this paper some of the social issues in contemporary Nigerian society are hereby spell out. These are sex education, culture, security education and introduction to computer technology (ICT), Environmental Education, Multi-ethnic education etc but this paper will dwell on environmental education.

The Concept of Social Studies Education

According to Mezieobi (2012) Social studies is the study of man and his interactions with environment. Its overall aim is to promote civic competence. Social studies is most commonly recognized in Nigeria as the name of a course taught in Primary and Junior Secondary Schools. It is also being taught in tertiary institutions up to the Doctoral level. Social studies was introduced in 1958 but limited to parts of the former Western Nigeria. It gained popular acclaim and acceptance especially in view of its role in citizenship education, national integration, political socialization, positive personality development and increased tolerance and accommodation of alien cultures. Social studies is the investigation of the totality of human activities. It is a field of study which a society uses to in-still in learners the needed knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and actions concerning the relationships human beings have with each other, and their environment, their world and themselves, (Okon, 2007). The subject was adopted in Nigeria about forty years ago as a result of the quest for relevance in the Nigerian education. The traditional subject like geography, history and civics inherited from the colonial education system were criticized for not being relevant both in purpose and content to the immediate needs of the Nigerian child and the society large. The traditional subjects also encouraged learners to know more about the colonial masters' country, the learner lack a

comparative knowledge about their own environment and their pressing problems in their society (Ukpai, 2012:31).

One of the other reasons for the adoption of social studies as set forth by the Mombasa conference in 1968, was that the new subject is supposed to enable every school-going child in Africa to understand people's interaction with their cultural social and physical environment, appreciate home and heritage, develop skills and attitudes expected of citizens and learn to express ideas in many ways (Mkpa, M. A. 2001). Social studies is a programme of study which a society uses to instill in the students the knowledge, skills, attitude and actions it considers important concerning the relationship human beings have with each other, the world and themselves. Man is at the centre of social studies, while his physical, political, cultural, psychological and socio-economic environments encircles him. This probably explains why National Teachers' Institute (N.T.I, 2000), upholds that social studies is an area of school curriculum specifically designed for the study of man and how he fits into the society by utilizing the necessary attitudes, values and skills of his reach.

Awe in Fadeiye (2005:06), is of the view that Social studies is a discipline if properly programmed and effectively taught should help to solve social problems that are facing developing countries like ours (Nigeria) where the old norms are fast losing their grips and without any effective substitute to replace them.

Again, Bozimo and Ikwumelu (2009) maintained that social studies aims at helping people develop the ability to make decisions so that they can resolve personal problems and shape policy by participating in intelligent social action.

There is widespread agreement that the appropriate aim of social studies is citizenship education or preparing of young people so that they possess the knowledge, skills and values necessary for active participation in society (Adeyemi and Jeremiah, 1998, Brown 1999, Whiteworth and Berson, 2003, Ross, 2004). Social Studies is the most inclusive of all school subjects and determining the boundaries of what is taught in social studies requires decisions about what knowledge is most important, which skills and behaviours are most valuable and what values are most significant (Rose, 2004). As a result, the field's curricular terrain is, has been, and will continue to be tested.

For social studies to achieve its citizenship education role, the goal of teachers in addressing pedagogical issues and practice is crucial. The literature in the field has argued the importance of participative, active learning about civics and citizenship by young people (Osborne, 1991, Patrick 1999; Udoukpong, 2012). The premise driving this argument is that an active approach learning by students will be reflected late in active approach to participating citizenship as adults (Prints and Smith, 2000).

Environmental Education

According to the American environment act of 1970, "environmental education means the education process dealing with man's relationship with his natural and man-made surroundings, and includes the relation of population, pollution, resource allocation and depletion, conservation, transportation, technology and urban and rural planning to the total human environment." Environmental Education according to Johnson et al (2001), is directed towards attitudes and emphasizes process rather than content. The primary objectives of environmental education is to bring the concept of environmental education into virtually every aspect of learning.

Generally speaking, environmental education may not be described as a totally new

subject as some aspects of it, like the values of conservation were being taught in other subjects before the introduction of environmental education. The important of the environment all over the world is gaining more and more awareness. This has made governments national and international organizations to review their attitude towards the environments (Duru and Nwagbo 1999). During the thirtieth anniversary of the United Nations Organization (UNO), a document entitled "Basic facts about the United Nations" was issued, and one of the things treated in that document was "Human Environment." The document states that "the common interest of mankind in the protection of the human environment has been recognized with a glowing sense of urgency in recent years." As a result of this urgency, the General Assembly in 1968 decided to convene a United Nations Conference on Human Environment in order to seek solutions to the many problems of pollution and other menaces to the earth. This Conference was held in June 1972 in Stockholm and was attended by about 1,200 delegates from 110 Nations. The Conference, for the first time, drew up a blue print for international action. Its declaration on Human environment was adopted and became the first international statement on preserving the habit of man. It proclaimed man's responsibility to protect and improve the environment for future generations. This conference gave rise to the creation of the United Nations Environment Programme with a 58 Nations Governing Council, an Environmental Co-ordination Board composed of Heads of United Nations Agencies, a Voluntary United Nations Environment Fund and a Secretariat headed by an Executive Director.

With this awareness environmental education was introduced which teaches, right from the primary school, the importance of the environment to man. This programme of

Education deals with man's relationship with his natural and man-made surrounding, which involved the relation of population etc, and Urban and Rural planning to the total human environment.

Environmental Education enables people to have good knowledge of their environment and also serves as a tool that can avert ecological crises and enhance the quality of the environment.

The Objectives of Environmental Education

For a better understanding of Environmental Education, it is important to take a cursory look at the objectives of Environmental Education as defined by the 1977 Tbilisi International Conference on Environmental Education. According to that Conference the following view considered as crucial namely:

- (a) Awareness, which helps social groups and individuals to acquire an awareness and sensitivity to the total environment and its applied problems.
- (b) Sensitivity, which helps individuals and social groups to gain a variety of experience in, and acquire a basic understanding of the environment and its associated problems.
- (c) Attitudes, which helps individuals and social groups to acquire a set of values and motivation for actively participating in environmental improvement and protection.
- (d) Skills, which provide social groups and individuals with an opportunity to be actively involved in all levels in working towards the resolution of environmental problems.
- (e) Participation, which provide social groups and individuals with an opportunity to be actively involved at all levels in working towards resolution of environmental problems and or issues, (Dania, P. 2010)

It is necessary for man to recognize the importance of his environment. In a place like Nigeria, people have poor environmental behaviour and his should not be allowed to

continue. That is why environmental education should be treated with the seriousness it deserves.

The Environment and Man

The environment plays a very important role in the life of man and therefore should be treated with the seriousness it deserves. It is reflected in every aspect of life hence we talk of physical, social, cultural, economic and political environment. Each of these influences man in one way or the other, and there is no way one can escape from their influence. It affects the people's quality of life. For example, all forms' of life depend on the physical environment for their continued existence. This goes to show that there is a need for one to study and understand his environment as it reflects all he does. Therefore, the call for environmental education is a genuine call, hence many nations of the world today are taking it seriously. Failure to do so today would cause regrets tomorrow, (Ukpai, 2012)

Environmental education is a very important aspect of social studies because of its important relationship to human life. That is why environmental education should not be over-looked so that people will be aware of the importance of their participation in preserving and improving the quality of their environment and in desisting from environmental degradation and abuse, (Duru Nwgbo, 1999).

The problems of the environment assumed a new dimension recently with the advent of modern technology and industrialization. If people, prior to this era were aware of the dangers, that neglect would cause and acted promptly, things would have been different. So It has become necessary to impress on the new generation the importance of the environment. Such education would enable them to understand the need for a good environment or their health and that of future

generations. Such knowledge will minimize environmental abuse. It will encourage public awareness in promoting and understanding the linkage between the environment and good health. Such awareness will encourage public participation in environmental control and management. Environmental Education will therefore enable the youths to recognize environmental problems and understand their dimensions as well as encourage them as individuals to do something to minimize environmental hazards, (Uchendu, 1997).

Social Studies and Environmental Education

Social Studies is an area of study that focuses in man and his interactions with his environment. That is why it is concerned with the environment and advocates for environmental education which helps man to understand his physical and social environments, which in turn encourages him to appreciate his cultural heritage. Therefore, in environmental education, people are induced or integrated into the life of their community and are made efficient and productive members of their communities. It enables them to develop skills and attitudes that help them to be self-reliant in their society. Social studies, in addition to fostering cooperation among people, also contribute in improving the community's quality of life which fosters community development. Social studies in dealing with environmental education fosters humanistic citizenship, intellectual, value and cultural heritage in members of the community. It prepares people for effective living in their communities (Mezieobi, 2005).

Social studies advocates and teaches that environmental education should be given a place in social studies curriculum so as to enable the youths to understand the negative consequences of environmental degradation and their effect on man and to realize that such a degradation could give rise to health hazards. All these necessitate the need to include environmental education in

social studies curriculum; such an inclusion will help the youths to acquire the skills and attitudes that motivate one to appreciate the value of one's environment. This will enable the individual to respect it and acquire positive attitude towards it, considering that the environment is "the most significant gift nature can endow on us" (Adamu, 1992:162).

Recommendations and Conclusion

In conclusion, for effective environmental education there are certain things that must be accomplished. Such things must aid the citizens in becoming environmentally knowledgeable and above all skilled and dedicated citizens who are ready to work individually and collectively towards maintaining a dynamic equilibrium between quality of life and quality of the environment. (Hungerford et al and T. L. Volk 1990). It should provide citizens with sufficient ecological knowledge which will enable them to make sound decisions on environmental issues. It should develop a conceptual awareness on the people which will influence the relationship between quality of life and that of the environment. So the citizens should have the necessary skills to investigate environmental issues and find possible solutions.

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