Primary Education globally is described as the prime or foundation of other levels of education. It serves as the springboard on which subsequent education of every child takes off; hence its relevance cannot be underestimated. The primary school teachers are expected to teach the entire subjects, including Social Studies. Social studies is a curriculum innovation designed to inculcate citizenship education, positive values, attitudes, skills and knowledge in the learners starting from primary school level. If well taught, Social Studies is expected to eradicate all shades of social ills in the society and thus, lead to the production of sound, humane and responsible citizens that will contribute meaningfully to the growth and development of the nation. However, Social Studies teaching in the Nigerian primary school system is beset with some problems, thereby derailing it from the attainment of its earmarked objectives. This paper x-rayed Social Studies as a core discipline in the Nigeria primary school system and highlighted its relevance. It also examined its problems as well as some panacea aimed at solving them.

Introduction

Primary Education in Nigeria is very vital for subsequent education of the child. A sound primary education is a necessity and a pre-requisite not only to a sound secondary, tertiary and continuing education, but also equips the learners with appropriate and relevant skills and values that may be applied in order to contribute one’s quota to national development. Primary education is the gateway to whatever individuals can achieve through education (Maduewesi, 2005). A child is exposed to various disciplines at the primary school level of education. These disciplines are expected to prepare the child for future life – educationally, socially, economically, politically and professionally. Consequently, Social Studies is one of the discipline where the child must be groomed. According to Obebe and Olatunde (2005), Social Studies as a subject, accepts all forms of knowledge in its scope and content as long as it will prepare the students to function as effective citizens and solve the problems of the society. It is the melting pot for all forms of knowledge aimed at solving the problems of man in a dynamic society. Its introduction into the Nigerian educational scene from primary level is aimed at inculcating positive values, good citizenship, moral and character training in the Nigerian child. These values cum qualities are necessary ingredients for the good of the child and the wider society. Ogunsanya (1984) posited that Social Studies is called Cultural Studies in some countries, Environmental Studies in other countries while in some other countries, it is known as Peace Education. He stated further that the different names given to Social Studies is as a result of the peculiar problems facing each country/community. Owing to this development, Awe (1976; 1 and 2) has this to say:

Social Studies as 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 no effective substitute to replace them.

A close look at our society today will reveals that all is not well. The society is suffering from moral deficit. In fact, it is bereaved of moral values. There is social melt dawn – massive corruption, kidnapping, political association, hostage taking, human trafficking, exam malpractice, cultism, dwindling economy, tribalism, unemployment, crime, prostitution, bad image abroad etc. these problem and more that are yet to emerge is giving the leadership of this great country serious concern. Though, all is not yet lost, these problems can be reduced to whisper level, if not totally eradicated using Social Studies as a pilot. Social Studies is a veritable tool that can be used to eradicate all
shades of Social ills plaguing our society today because, its contents/co-curricular contents is laced with positive value and if well taught from the primary level of education in Nigeria, will produce students with good character in secondary and tertiary levels of education, and these products will end up being good citizens in the wider society. This is why the society has to instill in pupils the actions it considers important concerning the relationship human being have with each other, their wards and themselves (Mgbor and Mgbor, 2005).

The thrust of this paper is to richly examine: the objective of Social Studies in primary schools in Nigeria, as tailored from the National Policy on Education (NPE) (2004); the relevance of Social Studies to the Nigeria primary school system; the problems of teaching Social Studies in the Nigeria primary school system; some recommendations aimed at making the teaching of Social Studies in primary schools in Nigeria to be relevant to the needs and aspirations of the Nigeria child.

Social Studies: Towards a Definition

Social Studies have been defined severally by many authors based on their personal understanding, beliefs about life and what Social studies should be. According to Kissock (1981), Social Studies carefully select concept, principles, methods, techniques from History, Geography, Sociology, Anthropology, Political Science, Economics, Science (Biology, Chemistry and Physics), Psychology, Civics, Religion etc, to solve social problems. Also Onyabe (1978) as well as Abdulkareem (1993) saw Social Studies as having the specific goal of citizenship training as it is directed towards knowledge, skills, values and belief geared towards democratic living within the social system”. In the same vain, Dubey and Barth (1980), saw Social Studies as the “process of education which utilizes the study of human life for the purpose of giving children the opportunity to practice solving problems of crucial importance both for the individual and the society. It is an integrative field of study which probes man’s symbiotic relationships with his environments, endows man with the reflective or contemplative capacities, intellectual, affective, social and work skills to enable him understand his world and its problems and to relationally solve or cope with them for effective living in the society (Mezieobi, Fubara and Mezieobi, 2008).

The Objectives of the Nigerian Primary School Social Studies

The National Policy on Education (FRN) (2004), provided the blue-print for the incorporation and eventual adoption of Social Studies as a core curriculum subject in primary and junior secondary schools in Nigeria. The idea behind this policy is hinged on the dire need to make education in Nigeria relevant to the needs and aspirations of the people. It states as follows:

(i) the inculcation of national consciousness and unity;
(ii) the inculcation of right type of values and attitude;
(iii) the training of the mind in the understanding of the world around; and
(iv) the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competencies both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of his or her society.

Drawing from the above national objectives, Dubey (1980), cited by Kadiri (2008) enumerated, the following as the objectives to be achieved by the learners from primary school Social Studies:

(i) Children self – confidence and initiative based on an understanding of their accomplishment and potentialities and their own worth.
(ii) Their power of imagination and resourcefulness.
(iii) Their desire for knowledge and continue learning
(iv) Their appreciation of the dignity of man and liberty
(v) Their sense of composition for the less fortunate
(vi) Their sense of respect for and tolerance of the opinions of others even in disagreement.
Their willingness to accept necessary changes within system of law and order deriving from the will of people.

Social attitude such as cooperation, participation etc.

A spirit of national consciousness and patriotism.

Social awareness and critical judgment, (pp. 100 – 101).

The Relevance of Social Studies to Nigeria Primary School System

Nwanna – Nzewunwa and Okoh (2002 : 3) posited that “the fact that Social Studies enjoys the status of a core subject, implies that it is perceived as a very important and worthy of being studied by all student” Social Studies equip the pupils with good knowledge of the environment – Physical, Social, Economic, Religious and Psychological, Cultural, Scientific and Technological. A good knowledge of these environments places the pupils at a vantage position and thus, provide him with veritable psychological and Social skills with which to prosecute the environment.

The teaching of Social Studies in primary school will also inculcate in the pupils citizenship training. Social Studies is laced with the study of the lives and achievement of great leaders heroes and heroines. Their past positive tract records acts as a veritable template for the younger generation who are potential future leaders. Okam (1998) posited that: Social Studies constitute one of the curricular arrangement accepted for the purpose of many strong foundation for the purpose of producing effective citizens.

The teaching of Social Studies in primary schools will acquaint the pupils with virtues of national consciousness. This can be achieved through the teaching of national Anthem, National flag, Nigeria Coat of Arm and other national symbols. Teaching Social Studies in primary school will also equip the pupils with knowledge of their environment and places farther a field. The teaching of topics like Nigeria as a nations, other people and culture impacts immeasurable knowledge in the pupils. Teaching pupils the rudiments of conservation of natural resources is the best option aimed at fine tuning the minds of the learners towards conservation and wise use of natural resources. The teaching of Social Studies involves the use of many resources. These resources may be man – made, natural, human and technological in nature, arrays of teaching recourses will place them in a good position to construct, manage and utilize these resources effectively and efficiently.

The pupils are taught positive social interaction in Social Studies classes irrespective of their divide, religions and tongues. This enables them to accommodate each others differences early in life. Social Studies help pupils to have ample knowledge of the constitution, law and order, culture of his people and that of other lands, as well as the value of cooperation, comradeship, effective citizenship, national unity, interdependence at community, local, state, national and international levels. The teaching of Social Studies in primary schools offers the pupils golden opportunity to be better informed about the various forms of government being practiced in many parts of the globe. This places them at a vantage position to contribute meaningfully to democratic issues when they grow up. Tapper (1976) in support of this view, pointed out that the school is a formal agent set up by the society to inculcate appropriate forms of political behaviours aims at the correction of their citizens.

Teaching elements of physical environment helps to eradicate episodes of superstititious beliefs from the minds of the pupils. This thus, places them on the right pedestal to explain natural phenomena like thunder and lightening, rather than thinking that they are manifestations of the spirits. Social studies teach the pupils rudiment of religion across all cultures of the world. This helps the pupils to imbibe the virtues of religious tolerance at tender age. Marriage laws and customs and types are also taught in primary Social Studies. This teaching prepares the pupils effectively for future harmonious marriages devoid of crisis. Moreover, Social Studies teaching in primary school integrate the pupils effectively for Social life. Teaching social skills and elements of morality, inculcates the essence of good behaviours in pupils.
That aside, teaching the customs, beliefs, norms, mores and taboos of the society provides the pupils with veritable instrument to be applied in taking decisions with regards to their behaviours. Airing from the above discussion, the relevance of Social Studies in the Nigerian primary school system cannot be undermined. A child that is well schooled in Social Studies contents is expected to be styled as worthy in character and learning and this will have a positive multiplier effect in the larger society, but this is far from reality, owing to some problem facing the teaching of Social Studies in primary schools. These problems are discussed below.

**Problems of Teaching Social Studies in the Nigerian School System**

Social Studies which is a core subject in the Nigeria primary school curriculum needs overhauling. A culture whereby only one teacher is made to teach several subjects including Social Studies is not good enough for effective teaching of the subject since no one has monopoly of knowledge. In most cases, many of the Social Studies teachers did not specialize in the subject. Therefore, rather than teach Social Studies as a problem approach, they teach it from the perspectives of their academic disciplines which are often discrete (Iyala, 2005).

That aside, the effective teaching of Social Studies in primary schools is beset with paucity of text books. Among the few available Social Studies text in circulation, only a handful of them only adapted to the integrated approach of the subject. Also, the cost of book publication is so exorbitant to the effect that budding writers are scared and the knowledge supposed to be shared with the public dies a natural death (Ikem, 2003).

Another problem facing Social Studies teaching is inadequate resources for the teaching of the subject. Resources like human, material, community technological resources assists the efforts of the teacher in the class. Against this development, Ossai (2005) posited that: A subject like Social Studies depends on the use of a number of resources to ensure that its objectives are realized.

The problem of inadequate funding cannot be over looked and this is the bane of Social Studies teaching in primary schools. In support of this, Osakwe and Itedjere (2005) asserted that: excursion, teaching aid and the purchase of useful and up-to-date texts require money. Finance is also needed for the establishment of Social Studies studio and library. Consequently, in a situation where money is not available, the effective teaching of Social Studies may be hindered.

Lastly another problem facing the teaching of Social Studies in primary schools is the inability of the teachers to adapt to the emerging areas in Social Studies education globally. The society which is the laboratory of Social Studies is dynamic and fluid and thus, its curriculum, teachers competence, strategies of teaching, teachers’ leadership styles etc. must change likewise especially in this era globalization where the world is now a global village. Primary school Social Studies teachers in the country are not growing to meet these changes in our society. This is not good for our future leaders.

**Recommendations**

In order to overcome the problems facing the teaching of Social Studies in primary schools in Nigeria, the following recommendations are made:

1. Social studies should be handled by only professionally trained teachers who specialized in Social Studies in at least, at the National Certificate of Education (N. C. E) level. This is very necessary because of the core status of the subject in the Nigeria primary school system.

2. For the teaching of Social Studies in primary schools to be effective, there is the urgent need to produce relevant text materials in the field. This can be achieved through the assistance of the government, Education Trust Fund (E. T. F), multinational companies etc.
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(3) Resources for the teaching of social studies should be made available in the right quantity and quality by the government, in order to add more meaning to the teaching of the subject in primary schools.

(4) The federals, states and local governments, private sector, Education Trust Fund (E. T. F) etc. should increase their yearly counter part funding, since the population of pupils enrolment is on the increase yearly.

(5) Social Studies teachers in primary schools should be sponsored yearly for seminars. This will enhance the effective teaching of the subject and it will equally accelerate their professional growth.

Conclusion
This paper examined the teaching of Social Studies in the Nigerian primary school system. As have been rightly stated, there are some problems facing effective teaching of Social Studies in primary schools. Considering the relevance of Social Studies to the society and primary school education in particular, something urgent need to be done to overcome these problems. Therefore, the paper recommends among others, the need to allow only professionally trained Social Studies teachers to handle the subject, relevant text materials should be produced, the funding of education should be increased yearly, and Social Studies teachers should be sponsored yearly for seminars.

References

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