

# THE ROLE OF PRIMARY SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES IN SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

By

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## **Abstract**

*This paper examined the role of primary school social studies in sustainable national development in Nigeria. This paper is of the view that primary school social studies curriculum, if well implemented, is one of the ways of developing human capital to facilitate sustainable national development. This paper also averred that the present developmental challenges in Nigeria requires the production of balanced citizenry with relevant knowledge, appropriate skills and worthwhile character needed for sustainable development. To this end, this paper discussed inter-alia, the concept of social studies, the nature and scope of primary school social studies curriculum, goals of sustainable national development, social studies and inculcation of national development and recommended among others, the use of learners' centered instructional methods for effective and efficient implementation of primary school social studies curriculum.*

## **Introduction**

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic nation with over two hundred and fifty (250) cultural groups. Nevertheless, it is the desire of every Nigerian to achieve nationhood by serving their fatherland with love, strength, faith and might so as to make Nigeria one nation that is bounded in freedom, peace and unity. It is also the aspiration of every Nigerian to be faithful, honest and loyal to the Nigerian nation by serving Nigeria with all their strength, defending her unity as well as upholding her honour and glory. All these, will propel Nigeria to achieving its national objectives and philosophy of free and democratic society, just and egalitarian nation, united, strong and self-reliant nation, great and dynamic economy and land of bright and full of opportunities for all Nigerians. Thus, the overall philosophy of Nigeria is to live in unity and harmony as one indivisible, indissoluble, democratic and sovereign nation founded on the principle of freedom, equality and justice, and promote inter-African solidarity and world peace through understanding (FGN, 2014). The achievement of this philosophy is dependent on effective and efficient inculcation of national consciousness and national unity, the inculcation of right type of values and

attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society, the training of the mind in the understanding of the world around and the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of his society (FGN, 2014).

However, the present comatose economy, socio-political quagmire, religious and ethnic pogroms, endemic insecurity and corruption, legislative pugnacity, rapacious leadership and followership, moral decadence, population explosion, unemployment cataclysm, cyber-crime, low standard of education, high rate of divorce, and poor scientific and technological activities show that Nigeria is still very far from national development. National development occupies a vital place in primary school social studies. This view has been aptly reflected in the goals of primary education which stated inter-alia: give citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society, mould the character and develop sound attitude and morals in the child, and develop in the child the ability to adapt to his changing environment (FGN, 2014). Primary school social studies is one of the mechanism of developing human capital to facilitate national development in Nigeria. This view is in accordance with the submission of Obama (2009), who posited that, critical thinking skills and insightful learning gained from social studies are necessary ingredient used to fight poverty, homelessness, crime and discrimination. In the same vain, Oganwu and Ojoganin Oganwu(2018), stated that Social studies is a problem approach discipline that proffers solutions to problems arising from man's interaction with one another. They equally averred that the mandate of Social studies is to raise a generation of people who can think for themselves and live as good citizens. It therefore means that, effective, efficient and productive implementation of primary school social studies curriculum would produce citizenry with the appropriate and relevant knowledge, skills and character required for national development in Nigeria. This is the crux of this paper.

### **The Concept of Social Studies**

The controversial nature of Social Studies has made the meaning of Social Studies an academic conundrum for scholars and the lack of standard definition for the subject has further convoluted any attempt to present a definition that would be universally accepted. Hence, Social Studies has been subjected to various definitions by scholars. Such arguments include the fact that social studies is a behavioural science, interdisciplinary, elective, value-based, environment-sensitive and generally dynamic (Iyamu, 2016). According

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to Ukadike (2010), while it is appreciated that definitions have a limiting or restricting effect, the fact is that they provide frame works which enhance initial understanding. This implies that the various definitions of Social Studies by scholars are necessary in order to have a clear and better understanding of the subject.

Okobiah in Nwalado (2007) noted that Social Studies, by understanding human relationships aims at producing citizens with skills, competences, moral values, and reasoned judgment to effectively live, interact, inter- relate and contribute positively to the economic, social, political and cultural development of the Nigerian society and the world in general. This assertion is in agreement with the definition of Adaralegbein Iyamu(2016), who noted that Social Studies is a study of how man influences and is in turn influenced by his physical, social, political, religious, economic, psychological, cultural, scientific and technological environment.

Social studies is a subject that blends together relevant learning experiences from the social sciences for the purpose of effective and productive teaching. No wonder Brunner in Nwalado (2020), viewed Social Studies as those portions of the subject matter of the social sciences particularly history, economics, political science, sociology and geography, which are suitable for study in elementary and secondary schools and are developed into courses of study whether integrated or not, and of which the content and aims are predominantly social. Osakwe and Itedjere in Oganwu (2018) quipped that the above definition made the assumption that not all knowledge from the social sciences is suitable for inclusion in the Social Studies programmes of primary and secondary schools. In other words, Social Studies does the work of sifting relevant knowledge from the social sciences disciplines in order to better understand man and his interaction with his complex environment. In the view of Iyamu (2016), social studies is a field of study with a focus on humanizing and socializing the individuals to make them acceptable, effective, and participatory members of the society. To humanize the individuals is to help them develop those attributes that promote living together, harmony, co-existence, tolerance, integration and accommodation. According to Osakwe (2010), social studies is concerned with the study of people in society, in space and time, and how they relate to one another and to the group to which they belong.

From the foregoing definitions of Social Studies, it is pellucid that the frame work of Social Studies involves social analysis, systematic enquiry, moral, conflict management, scientific and technological, values' and valuing. It also involves citizenship education, socialization, decision making,

knowledge acquisition, family life, civics, critical thinking, skills development, social sciences and humanities, information education, ecology, among others. Thus, Social Studies seeks to present to the pupils the broadest relevant spectrum of knowledge, skills and values about man's activities in his ever changing environment as well as the strategies of survival in his environment (Nwalado, 2020). Thus, social studies emphasize cognition and knowledge of concepts, principles and generalizations which help individuals to fit into and function well in the world of interrelationships (Iyamu, 2016).

### **The Objectives of Social Studies**

According to Oganwu (2010), the objectives of social studies have been classified into three broad groups which include:

- I. **Knowledge and Understanding:** of basic facts of the physical, social and political environment. This also deals with information on rule of law, democratization process, unity in diversity and sustainable development.
- II. **Acquisition of Basic Skills and Aptitudes:** Necessary for critical thinking, analyzing information, expressing opinions and ultimately reaching sound judgment.
- III. **Development of Healthy Positive Attitudes and Values:** such as cooperation, hard-work, open-mindedness, honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, participation, justice, fairness, tolerance, transparency, courage etc.

We must note that these laudable objectives of teaching social studies in primary schools are hinged on the National Philosophy of Nigeria and National Goals of Education as stated in (FGN, 2014) which includes the building of a free and democratic society, a just and egalitarian society, a great and dynamic economy, a united, strong and self-reliant nation and a land of full of opportunities for all its citizenry.

### **The Nature of Primary School Social Studies Curriculum**

Social Studies is concerned with how man solves the problems in his environment. Societal problems are multi-dimensional, ranging from political, social, economic, cultural, religious, psychological, ideological, medical and philosophical to scientific and technological problems. But man has to solve these problems not as a political scientist or historian or economist, but rather solves his problems as wholly integrated personality. Hence, the Nigerian nation has demanded that education and schools should help in building complete and balanced citizens that would contribute to the overall development of the society (Nwalado, 2020). It is in recognition of this clarion call, that the nature of Social Studies is designed to meet the needs, aspirations, challenges, ideologies and philosophies of the Nigerian society. Social Studies

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by nature is a discipline that helps people to acquire the relevant knowledge, skills and character required for personal and societal development. Thus, Social Studies emphasizes the importance of humans in the society. Social Studies by nature is the multi-disciplinary and integrative study of man's activities in his ever changing environment. That is, Social Studies acquires, adapts and integrates the relevant knowledge, skills and values from all disciplines in order to study man's activities in his environment. In Social Studies, we try to find out the origin of man, what man eats, his dressing mode, his settlement pattern, his economic, political, religious, social and technological activities in his environment. This view is in concord with the assertion of Obebe and Olatunde (2005), when they noted that, Social Studies education is learning about people, how and where they live, how they form structures and societies, how they govern themselves and provide for all their needs. Thus, Social Studies is a subject that gives its learners the opportunity to examine practical problems relating to their environment, seek solutions to them and apply the solution to their environment for modification (Obebe&Olatunde 2005). Nwalado (2007), contends that, Social Studies seek to present to the students the broadest relevant spectrum of knowledge, skills and values about man's activities in his ever changing environment as well as the strategies of survival in his environment. Social Studies, by nature, accepts relevant knowledge, skills and values in its scope and content provided they would help the students to solve their personal and societal problems. Social Studies has the potentialities of inculcating in the student the right type of knowledge, skills, virtues, good values and competencies, through a unified multi-disciplinary and integrative study of man's activities in his environment.

Instructionally, Social Studies focuses on the problems and issues of man in groups in his ever changing environment and helps pupils to acquire desirable social habits, attitudes, knowledge and requisite skills in solving this problems that are ever changing. Social Studies by nature, uses a holistic approach in identifying and solving the problems that confront man in his environment (Nwalado 2020). That is, Social Studies integrates relevant knowledge, skills and values from all disciplines to form a whole and treats the problem of man as one and proffers a single, enduring and lasting panacea. Thus, since Social Studies deals with man in totality, it means it has relationships with the liberal arts, the social sciences and the sciences in order to gain a pellucid understanding and wider perspective in the study of man and how he solves his environmental problems. Social Studies, as an integrative discipline draws its contents from scholarly disciplines of sociology, psychology, geography, political science, history, religion, anthropology,

economics, philosophy, the liberal arts, the sciences and contemporary issues in the society.

Despite the relationships between Social Studies and social sciences, the liberal arts and sciences, some structural differences can also be pointed out. Okobiah in Ofuase and Nwalado (2019) noted that the fundamental task of the social sciences, the liberal arts and sciences are scholarship and eventually social utility whereas the fundamental task of Social Studies is basically instructional and social utility. In the school system, Social Studies serves as a valuable resource for acquiring knowledge and providing necessary information for life, inculcating desirable social habits, attitudes and values as well as useful skills for problem solving, reading and writing skills much needed in adult life (Obebe&Olatunde 2005).

What distinguishes Social Studies as a field of study is that it is packaged to promote civic value, civic virtues, civic competence, civic skills and it is multi-disciplinary and integrative, incorporating relevant skills, values and knowledge from many fields of study in order to study man in totality. For example, in studying man in his environment, emerges the idea of origin of man and community (History), effect of weather on man's activities (Geography), how man lives in his community (Sociology), man's relationship with his God/gods (Religion), how man governs his community (Political Science), man's needs and wants (Economics), man's way of life (Anthropology), man tools and equipment (Science and Technology), man's perception about life (Philosophy), man's height and weight (Mathematics), how man distributes his good and services (Commerce), and his nature as a specie (Biology).

In confirming the multi-disciplinary and integrative nature of Social Studies, Lawton in Ofuase and Nwalado (2019), noted that Social Studies is a unified integrated subject which draws appropriate knowledge and experience from the social sciences and other disciplines about man and the environment for the purpose of citizenship education. This implies that, Social Studies in Nigeria is aimed at producing citizens with skills, competences, moral values and reasoned judgment to effectively live, interact, inter-relate, and contribute positively to the economic, social, political and cultural development of Nigerian society (Okobiah in Nwalado 2019). Social Studies starts its focus on man and his immediate family unit and spreads out to his community state, country and the world. Nzeribe (2002) expresses that, Social Studies is an investigation of human activities which studies man at home, at work, in politics, at play, in the community, nation and indeed every programme of his life.

### **The Scope of Primary School Social Studies Curriculum**

The scope of Social Studies is very broad, extensive and encompasses a wide range of disciplines. This is because the scope of Social Studies encompasses knowledge, skills, values, competencies, attitudes, character, and virtues from the social sciences, the humanities, liberal arts and physical sciences. In support of this fact, Osakwe and Itedjere in Nwalado (2020) noted that, the scope of Social Studies covers areas of knowledge, skills, and attitudes and values, with the ultimate aim of producing people who are socio civically competent. The scope of Social Studies covers all aspects of man's activities in the whole world. Thus, Social Studies is concerned with the development of the citizens with relevant knowledge, skills and attitude or character which enable them to be useful members of their society.

We must note also that, the scope of Social Studies is not static but dynamic. The scope of Social Studies is in a state of flux due to the factors of space, time and human development. Social Studies is a subject that focuses on man In his environment with the ability, capacity and capability to accommodate, incorporate and integrate new ideas, experiences, information, knowledge, values, skills, development and challenges in its scope that is dynamic in nature. Commenting on the dynamic nature of the scope of Social Studies, Adedoyin in Ofuase and Nwalado (2019), averred that as long as man lives on the surface of the earth, there will always be added dimensions to his problems, prospects, aspirations and achievements, all of which extend the frontiers in the nature and scope of Social Studies as a subject. Social Studies incorporates and integrates relevant knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, competence, civic virtues and concepts drawn from the social sciences, the liberal arts and the sciences blended together for instructional utility.

We should note also that the scope of Social Studies varies depending on the level and nature of the pupils the teacher is guiding to learn how to acquire knowledge, skills and values in Social Studies teaching learning process. Hence, the presentation of contents in Social Studies teaching-learning process follows a spiral method or pattern. The spiral nature of Social Studies curriculum is in accordance with the thesis of Bruner (1961) that any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development. What is required of the teacher is to identify the basic concept, generalizations and structure of the subject and present it to the learners according to their experiences, needs, interest, nature and level in a wider context. This implies that, even if the content of lower, middle and upper basic Social Studies curriculum are the same, the amount of details (Scope) required at the different levels would vary because of the needs, interests and

nature of the learners involved. Thus, Social Studies teaching learning process proceeds from the known to the unknown, simple to complex and from complex to abstract.

### **Sustainable National Development**

The word development is a multi-dimensional word, which implies that it has been defined differently by different people from different disciplines and perspectives. Development can be defined as a gradual growth of something (whether human or animal). So that it becomes more advanced and stronger. It can also be seen as what brings out the potentials as well improve the life of people which has transformative impact on the state and society. Thus, Anyanwu (2011) explains:

Development means the aggregated effort to improve every element or factor that would enhance the life and nature of persons in any community, small or large. It is social and human center.

This development is homocentric as well as anthropocentric: as such it centers human enhancement and the various facets of the society, rather than the improvement and enhancement of objects, things or inanimate beings adds that:

Development has to represent the whole gamut of change which an entire social system could move away from a condition of life widely perceived as unsatisfactory towards another condition regarded as materially and spiritually better.

Development therefore aims at re-generating and empowering members of any given society (both skilled in minds and in hands) rather than neither destroying nor marginalizing them in a way that would affect the society negatively. Thus, sustainable national development is any meaningful, relevant and appropriate development that is geared towards the enhancement of individuals, their attitudes, aspirations, ideologies, philosophies, values, virtues and welfare in the socio-economic and political life which will stimulate and facilitate development of any nation over a period of time. This development will also include technological advancement, freedom from poverty, illiteracy, famine, malnutrition, premature mortality, unemployment, ill health and diseases among others (Nwadiani, 2020). In the words of Munasinghe (2020), sustainable national development is a process of improving the range of opportunities that will enable individuals and communities to achieve their aspirations and full potentials over a sustained period of time while maintaining the resilience of economic, social and environmental systems that is unstable. This assertion is in accordance with the view of Nevin (2018), when he noted that sustainable development is a process of improving the range of opportunities that will enable individual humans and communities to achieve

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their aspirations and full potential over a continuous period of time while maintaining the resilience of economic, social and environmental systems. We must note that, the thrust of sustainable development lies in the fact that it puts into considerations the present conditions of the people and the society without compromising the needs and aspirations of the future generations. Therefore, the concept of sustainable development is a parameter or yardstick for measuring national development.

Some of the objectives which sustainable development is expected to realize are: increase capital income and employment, promoting future generations, achieving equity between rich and poor and participation on a broad basis in development and decision making is important (Sanni, 2020). No wonder the international communities through the United Nations Organization (UNO) averred that when there is sustainable national development of every nation, it will entrench peace, security, growth and development for the benefits of mankind. The achievement of national development led to the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which later metamorphosed to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which include the following:

**Goal 1:** Eradication of poverty

**Goal 2:** Zero Hunger i.e. food security and improved nutrition

**Goal 3:** Good health and well-being

**Goal4:** Quality education aimed at ensuring equal access and lifelong living opportunities

**Goal 5:** gender equality

**Goal 6:** Clean water and sanitation

**Goal7:** Affordable and clean energy

**Goal 8:** Decent work and economic growth

**Goal9:** Industry, innovation and infrastructure

**Goal10:** Reduced inequality

**Goal11:** Sustained cities and communities

**Goal12:** Responsible consumption and production

**Goal13:** Climate action

**Goal14:** Life below water

**Goal 15:** Life on land

**Goal 16:** Peace and justice strong institutions

**Goal17:** Partnership to achieve the goals

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### **Primary School Social Studies and Inculcation of National Development**

The ability of a country to improve the socio-economic and political welfare of its citizenry by developing the human capital and infrastructural, industrial,

scientific and technological development is what is referred to as national development. Education is one of the veritable instruments for achieving sustainable development both nationally and internationally, hence, the need for social studies education. Social studies education is one of the ways of developing human capital to facilitate national development. Social studies has its major purpose, the promotion of civic competence, integration of knowledge, skills and attitudes in solving societal problems and challenges. It is a discipline that ruminates and explores the dynamism of society and the changing nature of knowledge. It fosters new and integrated approaches resolving issues of significance to the people and environments (Osakwe, 2010).

Social studies at the primary school level focuses on the inculcation of desirable values which make the individual to relate effectively with others as members of social groups. It prepares the young ones to become active, honest, obedient, orderly and diligent citizens and to display these virtues everywhere, at home, school, community level, at work and when performing civic duties (Iyamu, 2016).

Given the social sensitivity nature of social studies in terms of its reflection of Nigeria's social realities, social needs and social aspirations, the social studies curriculum, in its flexibility, accommodates current issues and problems relevant to national development and proffers suggestions for improvement or elimination of such issues and problems that are antithetical to national development via decision making (Mezieobi, 2010).

Primary school social studies is a practical way of reawaking and reengineering our societal values. It is a veritable tool for the transmission of what is worthwhile to the people. It is a problem solving approach through which man studies and learns about problems in his environment such as cultism, sexual promiscuity, indiscipline, exam malpractice, materialism and general dishonesty (Oganwu, 2018).

The knowledge, skills and values included in primary school social studies curriculum is related to important generalization about human relationships, institutions and problems, together with supporting facts to ensure that these generalizations are well understood by the pupils. Social studies examines issues and problems from a holistic viewpoint. Consequently, in resolving a problem or issue, social studies examines the historical, cultural, sociological, economical, physical, and other related dimensions (Osakwe, 2010).

Primary school social studies instills civic dispositions such as support for human rights, equal rights, active socio-political participation and working to

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promote the common good including promoting justice, equity, fairness, egalitarianism, fair-play and shunning vices that could clog the process of national development. Social studies through civic education programme can bring out the best in pupils. Civic education, through social studies instruction, if well taught and material learnt is linked or relevant to local needs, skills and values emerging from such teaching will definitely enhance democratic life for us as a people especially as it relates to both rights and responsibilities (Osakwe, 2010).

The curriculum of primary school social studies is so vast that it prepares young people for full adult lives in this complex and dynamic world. This kind of preparation falls in line with Law (2004), dispositive curriculum that the global requirements for education in recent times include promoting life-long education, re-emphasizing the quality of learners' experiences, reorganizing subjects into key learning areas so as to develop broad knowledge base, and developing in the learner the ability to think critically and be innovative. This kind of education above afford the products of the system the ability to respond to social goals, economic realities and future life-challenges (Esu and Enu, 2010).

### **Conclusion**

The nature and scope of primary school social studies curriculum makes the subject a veritable instrument for socio-economic development. Primary school social studies is an avenue for providing pupils the relevant and appropriate knowledge, values and skills required for solving the social and environmental problems of the individuals, their communities, states, nations and their worlds. Effective and efficient implementation of primary school social studies curriculum would help to produce citizens with the right type of knowledge, character, skills and relevant competencies required for sustainable national development in Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

If primary school social studies must remain a sine-qua-non for sustainable national development in Nigeria, the following recommendations become imperatives:

1. Learners' centered instructional methods should be used by primary school teachers, for effective, efficient and productive implementation of primary school social studies curriculum.
2. Relevant effort should be made by government and private school owners to provide social studies teachers with opportunities for regular professional

development in the areas of content, instructional resources, evaluation techniques, pedagogical strategies and technological skills.

3. Parents should be more responsible in their responsibilities to their children and ward by providing adequate and relevant informal education, as lack of these is the bane of most developmental problems in Nigeria.
4. Primary school social studies teachers should lead by good examples for their pupils to emulate because pupils learn better by observation.
5. The school, home and society should share and promote same knowledge, skills, values and virtues required for sustainable development. This synergy will create a conducive environment for effective implementation of primary school social studies curriculum as well as achieving the desired impact on the socio-economic lives of the pupils and that of the Nigerian nation.

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