

SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION AS A SYNERGY FOR IMPROVING DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

By

Palmer Isite odogbor
Department of Social Studies,
Delta State College of Physical Education,
Mosogar

Abstract

The democratic scene in Nigeria has not been a perfect one since independence. It has been beset with one form of problem or the other because of multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic nature of the country and bad leadership at all levels of governance. The thrust of this paper therefore is to x-ray the issue plaguing democracy in Nigeria and how social studies education can be used to improve democratic governance in Nigeria

Nigeria as a nation is well known globally as the giant of Africa because of her abundant natural and human resources as well as her large population and landmass. As it was normal for all colonial powers to seek and mould the colonized countries in their own social, economic and political image, Nigeria couldn't escape the British Parliamentary structure inherited at independence (Alaribe, 1992:10). The British parliamentary system which Nigeria inherited from the colonialists was characterized with hydra-headed loopholes and weaknesses which did not augur well for the national unity and stability of the country. Nigeria as a pluralist society has problems with having a democratic leadership since her independence in 1960 (Agbatse, 2005). The prevailing situation in the Nigeria political scene, characterized by election violence or election malpractice such as rigging, thuggery, tribalism, bribery and corruption, endless legal battles against elected persons calls for attention of every lover of true democracy, peace and progress (Omooba, 2005). Nigerians and non-Nigerians irrespective of age, religion, colour and tongue have continued to wonder why Nigeria is unable to progress beyond this poor democratic culture and attitude.

The Newswatch Magazine had a special independence edition titled, A Nation in Crises, and was published in October 05, 2009. The edition x-rayed all facets of our

national life, including politics ... and came to the conclusion that the “Country has stopped moving” as what we have is a tale of dashed hope.

Nigeria is a case of pathetic paradox: She is very rich in natural resources, yet the citizens are poor; she is the most religious nation in the world, yet very corrupt; she exports crude oil and imports refined oil products; she champions peace keeping operations all over the world, yet her country is beset with terrorism.

The National Policy on Education (2004) stresses the relevance of Education as a veritable tool or instrument per excellence for transforming the Nigerian nation and makes her a just, free and democratic society. Just like the Biblical injunction of prophet Isaiah who said “here I am, send me” so is Social Studies Education assigned with the all-important task of promoting political consciousness and participation of learners through both its curriculum and co-curricular contents, with the main objective of entrenching positive political culture, values, attitudes and behaviours that will transcend the multitude of negative factors hitherto characterized in the Nigerian democratic scene. Piqued on this premise, this paper attempts to ruminate on social studies as a synergy for improving democratic system of governance in Nigeria.

The Concept, Social Studies and Democracy: Towards a Definition

Many authors, workers, persons, commissions, institutions, have defined Social Studies severally from their own perspectives, perception belief, specialization, prism, perpetual belief and what social studies should be. From the lead of Okobiah (1984), Ogundare (1987) and Ogundele (1987), Social Studies is an interdisciplinary approach to the study of man in group interrelationship aimed at producing good citizens with the needed skills, competences and values to effectively live, interact and contribute positively to our ever changing World. Asiwaju (1990:1), averred that Social Studies has some very close relationship with the social sciences. Mezieobi (1992) sees it as a formalized, correlated or integrated study of man and his environments which imbues the learner with the cognitive skills, values, attitudes, abilities and competences that will enable him become an informed, rational, analytical, participative and functional citizen in his environments and beyond. Iyamu and Edozie (2006), emphasized that social studies is a dynamic systematic and integrated discipline for generating knowledge, attitude and skills necessary for dealing with contemporary life issues. Social Studies is a response towards a goal-oriented education that is geared towards sensitizing young people to solving personal and community related problems (Ukadike, 2010). It is an integrated field of study that attempts to study man in-depth within the ramification of his dynamic environments, as well as equipping him with positive knowledge, attitudes, values and adaptive interactive skills for the purpose of producing a socio-civically competent human and effective citizenry who can contribute positively to the good of the society (Odogbor, 2010).

Drawing from the above obsequations, social studies as a discipline explores how man interacts with his dynamic environment and the relationship between man and his fellow man.

Democracy on the other hand came from the Greek words – “Demos”(people) “Kratia”(rule). This means rule by the people. Democracy is a system of government where the citizenry exercise governing power either directly or through representatives who are periodically elected through elections. Tunde (1994), posits that democracy is seen in a complex society as a political system which supplies regular constitutional opportunities for changing the governing officials and a social mechanism which permits largest possible part of the population to influence majority decisions by choosing contenders for political offices.

Presently, democracy has become very popular among developing and developed nations of the world as it implies freedom of speech and the rule of law, freedom of the press, and free and fair elections, no political killing, no intimidation of voters. In line with this perception of democracy, Ward (1972), cited by Mohamed (2003) Adumbrated that there are some essential elements of democratic governance as enumerated below:

- (i) There must be freedom of speech, writing and association provided the law is observed;
- (ii) There must be an effective means of finding what the people want;
- (iii) Government action must be open to public criticisms.
- (iv) Free Judiciary; and
- (v) People must have power to change the government.

Other elements of democracy as posited by Osuji (2009) are:

- Fundamental human rights are recognized and guaranteed by the constitution and respected by the state. These include right to life, liberty, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of movement, freedom of association, religion and thought, equality before the law, the right to criticize government, the right to privacy and family life.
- There must be free and fair elections which must be held periodically as prescribed by the law.
- The government must consult the populace before taking major decisions.
- There must be rule of law which must be respected particularly the aspect dealing with equality before the law. Also the judicial process must ensure that individuals' rights are not violated by the state.
- Finally, the judiciary must be fearless and independent in the exercise of their judicial powers.

In sum, democracy is a form of government where the electorates choose their leaders or representatives through free and fair elections.

Democracy in Nigeria Today

The crisis in democratic governance has assumed a phenomenal dimension in the current process of political, social, economic and religious development in Nigeria. Our country is beset with monumental issues that make it almost impossible to carry out our democratic governance. Among such problems according to Fadeyiye (2001) is:

- 1) **Ethnicity:** the ethnic factor has played a divisive role in democratic governance and it has remained so hitherto.
- 2) **North and South Dichotomy:** Fear of domination agitates the minds of Southerners and Northerners as well.
- 3) **Religious Fanatism:** Religious fanaticism or intolerance is the evil that is difficult to content with in Nigeria. It has eaten into the minds of our leaders and has become a volatile issue in Nigeria. It is currently serving as a clog in the wheel of democratic leadership.
- 4) Lack of the ability to produce new ideas in governance. They stick to colonial ideas.
- 5) **Favouritism:** The manner, in which governance, establishment and national cake are shared, shows favouritism. Our leaders show favouritism in employment, award of contracts, location of government projects etc.

In addition, Kalu (2005) posited that the current trends in our overall political and social environment are considered as serious aberrations. Numerous examples of them abound – such as political violence and riot, religious and ethnic clashes or disturbances, various forms of motivated political murder, the activities of “Boko Haram”, militancy, cultism and ritual killings, intimidations and autocratic posture of elected members, high class bribery and corruption, arrogance and victimization of those with opposing views, sycophancy, fighting, intrigues, greed etc. are all serious aberrations in a democratically constituted governance system.

Today, Nigeria is frantically sick from the injuries of democratic governance. Many of the ills happening in Nigeria today amount to national shame, pains and disgrace. This shame, pains and disgrace were brought to the fore as a result of our nascent democracy which is characterized by violence leading to loses of many lives and properties, massive rigging during elections and assassination of political opponents. The political terrain in Nigeria is laced with communal, ethnic and religious affiliations and class difference. Those at the helm of affairs make appointments and formulate policies and programmes out of selfish motives, rather than from progressive motives that will better the lives of the masses. Thus, there are appointments of square pegs in round holes. Projects are located where they are not viable. The end result is colossal waste and failure. Many of our leaders instead of moving the country forward, they are

bent on moving their bank accounts and pockets forward, while the masses are suffering in abject poverty.

Nigeria has some of the best brains scattered all over the world, but they cannot come home because of insecurity of lives. The Nation Newspaper of 27th June 2010 noted with great concern that – Nigeria House of Representatives is becoming more a dynasty of profligacy, and outright treasury looting. They fought half-naked in the house, tearing their clothes/dresses, using dangerous weapons because of money rather than issues of national significance or passage of good bills. Most Nigerian leaders have gone into leadership to serve parochial interest, rather than looking at themselves as rulers of their nation state, they look at themselves more as leaders of where they come from, the religion and the political party to which they belong, thus engaging in a kind of leadership that is based on the element of disunity, favouritism and “divide and rule”(Agbatse, 2005). Many of our leaders are not interested in the welfare of the masses they represent. Some of them had dared their accusers by asking them, if they (accusers) sent them to their current political positions (Osakwe, 2010). Most of them were never elected but bought their chances into the office or were selected by political godfathers and through massive rigging during elections, thereby preventing the best candidate from emerging as winner.

Politics in Nigeria is now the only last resort for school drop-outs, “Garage boys”, “419” cultists, militant setc, yet they make laws for the intelligentsia to obey. What type of democracy is this?

The Save Nigeria Group (SNG) (2010) reported that about \$89 billion of Nigeria’s funds has been stolen by the country’s political managers and carried out of the country for safe keeping. This is the height of corruption in Nigeria’s democracy, and as a result of the massive corruption in the country, the Roman Catholic Church in Nigeria has inculcated a Prayer Against Corruption in Nigeria in her Liturgy. The prayer is said in the following way:

PRAYER AGAINST BRIBERY AND CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

Father in Heaven, you always provide for all your creatures that all may live as you have willed. You have blessed our country Nigeria with rich human and natural resources to be used for your honour and glory and for the wellbeing of every Nigerian. We are deeply sorry for the wrong use of these gift and blessings through act of injustice, bribery, and corruption. As a result of which, many of our people are hungry, sick, ignorant and defenseless. Father, you alone can heal us and our nation from sickness. We beg you, touch our lives and the lives of our leaders and people so that we may realize the evil of bribery and corruption and work hard to eliminate it. Raise for us God-fearing people and leaders who will care for us and who will lead us to the path of peace, prosperity and progress. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is also a bane to democracy in Nigeria. They work hand in hand with the government that appointed

them into office or the highest bidders who give them bribe or “Ghana must go” and “cook” election results, and in most cases, the results to an election must have been known few days to the commencement of the election proper and when the election is eventually conducted, and results officially announced. There is usually no difference from what had been hitherto rumoured to be the outcome of the election results. This is the height of electoral malpractice.

Social Studies Education as a Synergy for Improving Democracy in Nigeria: Social studies has been used all over the world to solve problems militating against democracy, especially in the United States of America, where it originated in 1950s (Agbatse, 2005). The effective teaching and learning of Social Studies at all levels of education in Nigeria will therefore place the learner’s in a vantage position to contribute meaningfully to democratic issues in Nigeria. Kochar (2002) posited that the philosophy of social studies among others is:

- To establish and promote good human understanding.
- To develop new approaches to the solution of problem.
- To promote democracy principles and value among people of the world. The teaching of social studies can solve problem of disunity, ethnicity, bribery and corruption, religious intolerance, laziness, lack of patriotism, political instability, election rigging, painlessness etc. the inculcation of the right type of values in individuals through social studies can be of great value to Nigeria as a state (Agbatse, 2005).

Social Studies is taught in schools in order to inculcate in the learners direct training in citizenship. Knowledge about democracy is better understood through citizenship education because it provides students and the general public with a wide range of issues that will enhance their contributions to democratic governance.

A lot of political socialization is also transmitted in social studies through its robust content in leadership style, political behavior and attitude, activities of government, duties and obligations of citizens etc. that will mould the learner to be a good leader and by extension a good citizen of a state or country.

Recommendations

The real challenges of democracy in Nigeria are to ensure the emergence of good governance through visionary, positive and responsive leadership. Social studies Education is well armed with the needed knowledge relevant for improving democratic leadership in Nigeria such leadership must display the following attributes:

- a) Give respect to the tenent of the nation’s constitution;
- b) Free itself from ethnic inclinations and strive to harness the immense potential of Nigerians to build one strong and indivisible nation;
- c) Abolish all divisive issues and eradicate religious conflicts;
- d) Be strong proponent of meritocracy and elimination of corruption and

- e) Be as an example of fine intellect, dedication, sacrifice and selfishness (Akpochofo, 2010).

Conclusion

Nigerians' as a nation is beset with the problems of democratic governance right from the onset. These problems can be reduced below whisper level and by the grace of God totally eliminated through the effective teaching and learning of Social Studies in our schools, because social studies is driven by the belief that it can change the mindset of people towards positive direction of accepted norms, values, beliefs, attitudes, behaviours and practices accepted by the society.

References

- Agbatse, M. E (2005). Social Studies Education and the Quest for Democratic Leadership in Nigeria. *Journal of Social Studies Association of Nigeria (SOSAN)*, 8(1): 19-112.
- Akpochofo, W. P. (2010). Good Governance- A Recipe for Sustainable Development in Nigeria in E. O. (Ed). *Social Studies and Integrated national Development in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Kraft book Limited 43-51.
- Alaribe, F. (1992). The *Third Republic and Prospect in the Search Light*. February 1991 – January 1992. 10-13.
- Asiwaju A. I. (1990). Forward in Olatunji, W 91990). Social Studies Basis for National reconstruction. Ibadan University Press Plc.
- Fadeiye, J. O. (2001). *Social Studies for Pre N.C.E*, Oyo: Immaculate City Publications.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2008). *National Policy on Education*. (Revised edition). Lagos: NERDC Press.
- Iyamu, E. O. S. & Edozie, G. C. (2006). Communal Crises and Intervention Strategies in Nigeria: Implication for Social Studies Curriculum *Nigeria Journal of Teacher Education and Teaching* 2(1): 137-144.
- Kalu, B. A. (2005). Democracy and the governance system: Stability and sustainability Issues. *Journal of Social Studies Association of Nigeria (SOSAN)* 8(1) 22-25.
- Lewis, Adejumo (2008). Nigeria, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow – A Cultural Perspective. *The Guardian* 19(818) pp 18-20

- Mezeiobi, K. A (1992). Nigeria as a Nation in Ikwemelu, S. N. and Mezeiobi, K. A (Eds) Social Studies: *A Book of Readings*. Onitsha: Etukokwu Publishers.
- Mohammed, I. S. (2008). Their Contribution Islam can Offer Towards Sustaining Democracy in Nigeria. A Paper Presented at the National Conference Organized by the School of Award Social Sciences F.C.E. Katsina.
- Nanaghan, B. (2010). "Nigeria as a Failed State" Vanguard 25 (62122) pp.18
- Odogbor, P. I. (2010). Ensuring Food Security in Nigeria: Implications for Social Studies Curriculum in Osakwe E. (Ed) *Social Studies and Integrated National Development in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Kraft Book Limited.
- Ogundare, S. F. (1987). Teacher Factor in Social Studies Teaching and Learning Process. *Nigeria Journal of Curriculum Studies*. Special Series 2.
- Ogundele, A (1987). *A.C.E, G. C. E, N.C.E Integrated Social Studies*. Ibadan: United Stars and Co.
- Okobiah, O. S. (1984). Towards a More Evaluation Method of Teaching Social Studies in Okobiah O. S. and Udoh, E. W. E. (Eds). *Social Studies in National Development and Integration*. A Publication of SOSAN at the Institute of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- Okobiah, O. S. (2004). Democracy in Nigeria: The Way Forward. Being a Lead Paper at the 19th Annual National Conference of Social Studies Association of Nigeria (SOSAN). Held at the Benue State University, Makurdi, 9-15 August 2004.
- Omooba, B. T. (2005). Social Studies Education in a Democracy, *Journal of Social Studies Association of Nigeria* (SOSAN) 8(1) 189-193.
- Osakwe, E. (2010). Social Studies and Politics in Nigeria in Osakwe E. (ed). *Social Studies and Integrated National Development in Nigerian*: Ibadan: Kraft Books.
- Osuji, N.C. (2004). A Keynote Address Presented at the Annual National Conference of the Social Studies Association of Nigeria at the Benue State. University, Markurdi, 9-15 August, 2004.

Palmer Isite odogbor

Some Nigeria Group (2010). A Contract to Save and Transform Nigeria (SNG).Publication, Lagos.

The Nation Newspaper(2010). Nigeria House of Profligacy, June 27.

The Newswatch, Magazine(2010). The Nation in Crises, October, 5.

Ukadike, J. O (2010). The relevance of Social Studies Education in National Development in Osakwe E (ed). ***Social Studies and Integrated National development in Nigeria***. Ibadan: Kraft Book Limited.