

REFOCUSING SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION FOR RELEVANCE AND SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This paper is on refocusing social studies education for relevance and sustainable national development. It focuses on the nature, scope and dimensions of social studies, as well as highlighting some of the major orientations in social studies education that can foster relevance and sustainable national development. Lastly, the paper tries to examine how social studies education can be refocused to bring about relevance and sustainable national development and some recommendations are made.

Introduction

This paper is on refocusing social studies education for relevance and sustainable national development. To fully comprehend this subject matter, it is imperative to define the concept of social studies and development, which will influence the understanding of this topic.

Social studies, according to Obemeato, Ogugua, Agu and Laosebikan (1981), is a study of how man influences and is in turn influenced by his physical, political, religious, economic, psychological, cultural, scientific and technological environments. Makinde (1979), described social studies as "the study of the interrelations between man and his physical and social environments, the problems and issues posed by these interactions and the ways by which man seeks solutions and classifications to them... Social studies is an attempt to study the totality of man's existence on earth" CESAC, (1979), stated that social studies deal with man in the society as a whole.

Though there are other definitions of social studies, these three aforementioned definitions will do for our understanding of the discipline. From the foregoing definitions, we can describe the subject as one that is concerned primarily with the study of people, their environments, the society in which they live, the aspect of man's problem and thereby helping to seek solutions to them. Social Studies education is a distinct field of study that can bring transformation to any nation in all aspects of life.

The United States of America (USA), which is regarded as developed country and the 21st century world power could not have achieved this status without the help of social studies education. If USA, a nation of various races, can have a national outlook and transform their nation in all aspects of development, Nigeria with her multi-ethnic and religious characteristics, can equally achieve sustainable national development, by being committed and dedicated to this course.

In this regard, social studies in Nigerian educational system have been that of a tool for fostering national unity, citizenship and self-reliance, all geared towards relevance and sustainable national development. It also makes education more relevant to the society through teaching students to develop positive attitudes and acquire relevant skills and knowledge that can promote national development.

Much emphasis on social studies education came after the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970. It should be noted that the introduction of social studies into schools and colleges in Nigeria and in different states of the federation came at various times and employed different strategies, hence, its incorporation into the syllabus of junior secondary school to reflect the idea of new national policy on education.

Today, social studies is offered up to post graduate levels in the Nigerian universities with the aim of producing citizens who are going to be sensitized to their environment - socio, political, economic, cultural and technological. These citizens will not only appreciate the problems and proffer viable remedies, but also understand the potentialities of their environments, which can be tapped and harnessed for relevance and sustainable national development.

According to Onyemelukwe (1977), development involves a society's transformation through its institutions, organization, social rules, customary usage and attitudes to an extent that makes the society more and more positively responsive to desired modern changes. The implication of this definition of development is that development involves transformation and that the transformations

are dependent upon the society's institutional make-up as well as its social, cultural and attitudinal set up.

Onyemelukwe (1977), added that development also resides in the more intangible aspects of national behaviour. These include, the way the political system is operated, the manner in which the social or ethnic group works together and fit into the state structure. He also stated that, too much emphasis is placed upon economic growth and the statistics of per capita income because these are easy to measure. According to him, development is also about what is loosely described as "the quality of life".

From the above definitions of development, it can be stated that the meaning of development as a concept has gone beyond the narrow perspective of economics or any single field of knowledge. Instead, its understanding can only be possible in all aspect of man and his environment. Thus, national development is that transformation, growth and progress of physical, political, social, economic and cultural aspect of a-nation.

Every individual, community, society, nation and the world at large desires development. One of the major approaches to development is through education, which has to do with the inculcation of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes, with the major aim of transforming the individual who in turn becomes an instrument of development to himself, family, community, nation and the world. Teachers play the greatest role in the process of transforming the child who would eventually transform the nation.

The educational curriculum of a nation is made up of the experiences offered to the student under the guidance of the school. Thus, the curriculum is implemented at all levels of our educational institutions under various disciplines. Every discipline has its own contributions to make towards relevance and sustainable national development. This write-up is on examining how social studies education is being refocused to bring about relevance and sustainable national development.

Nature, Scope and Dimensions of Social Studies

Social studies is seen as an integrated study which focuses on problems of man's survival struggle in the process of his interaction with his environments. In focusing on the problems however, social studies takes into consideration all conceivable factors and aspects of all the problem be it historical, geographical, technological, political, economical, sociological, religious and psychological etc. It thus, employs the analytical approach to the identification and study of man's problems in this multi-faceted environment. Social studies therefore, used horizontal and spiral approach for the analysis of societal problems.

Indeed, social studies by its nature, has to be closely tied to society. It aims at imparting values and information necessary for life. Its basic function is to help pupils to inculcate desirable social habits, attitudes and values, as well as useful skills of listening, reading, writing, calculating and problem solving and those of intellectual and manipulative nature. Thus, one basic character of social studies is its dependence on cultural determinism (Adey'nka, 1975).

The most important character of social studies is that it is a corrective study in the sense that it examines the present educational system with a view to correcting the ills of the colonial system that sought to prevent national unity and development. Social studies is also the study that emphasizes the importance of man. Man is put in the central position and his activities are studied in relation to his various environments, which could be physical, social and psychological etc.

The scope of social studies refers to what it covers or what it entails. The scope of social studies will remain ever-changing areas given the factors of space, time and human development. Social studies tries to gather relevant knowledge, values and skills centred around the subject that forms part of these broad spheres of man. It is a subject that centers around man examining how man manipulates and is manipulated by the various environments in which he finds himself. Thus, the subject includes knowledge, skills, concepts, attitudes, and values drawn from history, geography, economics, political science, physical sciences, psychology, sociology, and anthropology, among many others.

CESAC (1979), identifies four dimensions of social studies which are (a) man and his social environment, (b) man and his physical environment, (c) man, science and technology and (d) interactions between man, the environments, science and technology.

Man and his social environment: In this aspect, man lives in an environment that is made up of people whom he interacts with and in turn influence his behaviour. The social environment that he interacts with include the food he eats, the religion of his people their way of dressing, their peculiar way of thinking and acting as well as their general way of life. Man can in turn influence his peoples' way of life through his discussions and participation in the community's projects that can foster relevance and sustainable national development. These influences and counter-influences are the results of man's interaction with his social environment.

Man's physical environment consists of territory that is grassland, thick forest, lakes, desert, highland, plateaus, lowland, oceans, reverine areas, creeks etc. He is influenced by these territorial areas and he in turn influences them. Although, the physical environment determines what man can do, but he is not a slave to his environment. Man makes use of the resources found in his environment for the betterment of himself, his community and his nation.

Man creates science and-he utilizes them to his advantage. He uses them to modify, control and exploit his environment effectively. However, the existence of science and technology also influence man's behaviour. Although levels of science and technology differ from one environment to the other, yet, they are used to advance man's level of interaction with physical and social environment that can foster relevance and sustainable national development.

According to CESAC (1979), social studies is interested in the interaction between man and his environments, science and technology. Thus man becomes the wheel of all interaction in the society. Indeed, the various aspect of interaction between man, environments science and technology are unlimited but the only incontestable fact is that, social studies education provides effective interaction between man and his environments (physical and social) as well as science and technology that can lead to relevance and sustainable national development.

Social Studies Major Orientations

Personal Education: Iyewarun (1984), observes that for social studies to provide all round education for the individual child, it has to provide for highly developed individual with a sense of direction, freedom of thought and action. The personal education of social studies is to help students sort out confusion of the social world, develop tactics for inquiring into social problems, interact and develop rational means to modify conflicting values and decisions that can foster relevance and sustainable national development.

Social Education: A carefully selected content in social studies is to ensure that the individual participates effectively in the progress of his community. To this end, social education or citizenship education would help to prepare students for social responsibilities and for perpetuating the good image, heritage and integrity of his own society. Iyewarun (1984), opines that since man is at the beginning of the biggest social revolution which has greater implication than the industrial revolution and by which man cannot afford to be ignorant of the facts of life then social studies involves:

- (a) Equipping students with dynamic ideas,
- (b) Imbuing students with the highlight appreciation of their heritage and willingness to participate fully in the political, social and spiritual life,
- (c) Training students who can formulate, propose, advocate and direct the affairs of mankind.
- (d) Providing needed informal skills not only for adapting to the rapidly changing world but also for shaping the future of the nation.

Consequently, therefore, the social education aspect of social studies is to train students in the skills of formulating, proposing, advocating and directing purposeful ideas in the affairs of the nation and mankind. In this regard also, social education is to inculcate the spirit of freedom, social justice, equality, patriotism, fairness and equity to bring about relevance and sustainable national development.

Intellectual Education: In order to identify, and solve social problems, a student should be able to know how to use the analytic ideas and problem-solving tools developed by scholars in social sciences. The main purpose of intellectual aspect of social studies then is to introduce students into modes of thinking critically, creativity and scientific thoughts. Intellectual education in social studies provides the opportunity for learning to be made a continuous process of reconstruction of daily

experiences to enrich intellectual aspects of education together to develop a "whole man or "total man" thereby encouraging relevance and sustainable development.

Ways of Refocusing Social Studies Education for Relevance and Sustainable National Development

Social studies as a new discipline and a diverse subject needs to be refocused to bring about relevance and sustainable national development by putting of the right caliber of professionally qualified social studies teachers in the social studies classroom to man the interactive process. The social studies teachers who by their professional training know, understand and appreciate the significance of the utilization of (he investigation - oriented, critical thinking eliciting teaching methods such as inquiry, problem-solving and discovery as well as value-clarifying model and role-playing strategy to cohere nation-building, would readily utilize them in the appropriate social studies teaching and learning situations. -

For refocusing social studies education for relevance and sustainable national development, there is need for adequate teaching aids and social studies laboratories to be provided in schools. There is greater need to fund our educational technology centers so that they can produce enough relevant teaching aids and laboratories for the teaching of social studies. Apart from the National Education Technology Centre (NETC) and (he States' Ministries of~Education Resources Centres, there is the need to establish zonal and local resource centers that would produce teaching aids for the teaching of social studies. The teachers also need to be encouraged to improvise relevant teaching aids for social studies that can make the teaching and learning of social studies more meaningful which can bring about relevance and sustainable national development.

The problem of curriculum content selection in social studies should be looked into when trying to refocus social studies education to bring about relevance and sustainable national development. Awoyem' (1988), advises teachers to familiarize themselves with the thought patterns of pupils, attitudes and beliefs, interests and value as well as the type of society that exists and the predominant human trend within it before selecting units for teaching in social studies. Furthermore, to reduce the problem of content selection in social studies, Onyike (1981), advices that the criteria of validity, relevance to life, variety, cumulation, multiple-learning, significance, utility, interest and learnability must be well considered. He also cautions that, no one criterion should be applied in isolation .or earned to the extreme. Consequently, he suggests that learning experiences and content must be selected in relation to the objectives of the subjects and the methods to be used for the achievement of the objectives. Specifically therefore, Iyewarum (1984), advises that social studies content should emphasize concept development, modes of inquiry and appropriate skills and values which are based on sound rationale and which have long range significance for citizenship education.

Social studies classroom must be reasonably democratized in order to elicit the creative thinking and participative capacities of the learners. These qualities would ultimately be beneficial for relevance and sustainable national development.

The problem of low teachers morale as a result of poor remunerations in teaching profession must be looked into when trying to refocus social studies education for relevance and sustainable national development. Despite the fact that the salaries of teachers are poor yet some are not paid for upward of three months. In these circumstances, the teachers cannot be expected to be dedicated and committed to their duties. Teachers should be highly paid to boost their morale and to make them to be more committed and dedicated to (heir duties.

Recommendations

The recommendations that would assist refocusing social studies education for relevant sustainable national development are as follows:

- (i) Only teachers who are specialists in social studies should be employed to teach the subject so as to transmit the desirable objectives of social studies to the learners,
- (ii) Government and school management should permit and assist social studies teachers to develop themselves through in-service training programmes.
- (iii) Social studies teachers must use resource materials that would enhance the teaching - learning process.

- (iv) The government should encourage and mobilize the indigenous scientists and technologists for more research and development activities by organizing conferences, workshops and seminars for them both in and out of the country leading to national development.

Conclusion

This paper discussed how social studies education should be refocused for relevant and sustainable national development. The knowledge, skills, values and attitude acquired through the teaching and learning of social studies would be used for national development. Social studies is the only subject that can effectively inculcate into individuals the desirable values, ideas, beliefs and attitudes, which would enable individuals, develop the nation. Because it is a subject that trains the "head" and the "heart" Obemeta Ogugua, Agu and Laosebikan (1981), described social studies as a "key to unlock" the tender hearts-of the pupils/students and plant "tools" which would be used for national development in later years.

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