

## SOCIAL STUDIES AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR NATIONAL INTEGRATION

### Abstract

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Despite the fact that before the British came to colonise what is today known as Nigeria, there were already unifying factors binding the various ethnic nationalities together, there have been many crises experienced by her since independence in 1960. In some of these crises Nigeria almost disintegrated along 'ethnic' lines. The military coups and the civil war are examples of such crises. There has been general mistrust of each other. This paper examines the obstacles to integration, attempts made by previous governments to address it and the role social studies as a subject in our school system could play in achieving the much-talked-about and much-desired national integration which has eluded her for decades. The paper recommends ways to make this possible and it is hoped that if implemented sincerely, national integration would be achieved and peace and progress would be attained in this country that is blessed by the Almighty in terms of human and natural resources.

### Introduction

There are various definitions of Social Studies, Dubey, D. L. and Barth, J. L.;. (1980) visualized Social Studies as

The investigation of human activity; it studies man, at home, at work, at worship, in politics, at play, in the village, in the nation, everywhere, engaged in his busy programme of living. Social Studies is particularly interested in man's problems about which decisions must be made.

According to Kisson (1981, P.6), Social Studies is a programme of study which a society uses to instill in students the knowledge, skills, attitudes and actions it considers important concerning the relationships human beings have with each other, their world and themselves

Oloobou's (1989), conceptualization of Social Studies also deserves noting. To him, Social Studies is an organized, integrated study of man and his environment, both physical and social, emphasizing on cognition, functional skills and desirable attitudes and actions for the purpose of providing an effective citizenry.

Mansaray (1984: P.12), states that Social Studies is the study of the interactions between man and his physical and social environment, of the problems and issues posed by these interactions and of the way by which man seeks solution and clarification.

In whatever way Social Studies is defined, one thing is common. It involves the interaction of man with his environment, the problems generated, and how to solve these problems. Awareness is the key to solving of problems in man's environment, and Social Studies education in Nigeria creates that awareness.

In the judgment of many publications, for example NERC (1977), education embraces not only the deliberate activities of attending schools, colleges and universities, but also indirect and incidental influences which help us to learn. Such factors or influences and activities affect our character, behaviour and human faculties such as our way of seeing, hearing, talking, thinking, reasoning, remembering and solving problems.

Social Studies Education therefore entails the study in educational institution and indirect and incidental influences which help us to understand the relationship between man and his physical and social environments. This in turn will help us in our quest for the much-desired National Integration in Nigeria.

### The Meaning of National Integration

Iheagwam (2002), defines national integration as "unity in diversity". Bhatia and Narang (1984) in their education for national integration have proposed four conditions which an integrated nation has to possess:

- I The feeling of oneness;
- Ii The sentiment of nationalism;
- Iii Social, political, economic, emotional, linguistic and cultural unity;
- Iv Common ideas of life and a common code of behaviour.
- V The ability to subordinate sectarian and parochial loyalties to loyalty to the nation.

Glancing at these conditions, it is obvious that our dear country Nigeria cannot be regarded as an integrated nation as at today. Once in a while, Nigerians show the feeling of oneness and the sentiment of nationalism only during football matches involving the national team. Millions of Nigerians follow the game by radio and television. They feel and talk as if they are one big family. They celebrate with one another when the national team wins. Everybody feels very unhappy when the team loses. This feeling lasts only for a short time.

Iheagwam (2002), maintains "that integration "is a mental attitude, development of a mental

climate that would help in terms of oneness, irrespective of political or religious inclinations of the people concerned. A nation is a nation because its people passionately and unanimously believe themselves to be so".

We have seen often when politicians of different political inclinations fight each other in the course of deliberations in their various States and national assemblies. The same with people of different religious divide. Do we Nigerians passionately and unanimously believe that Nigeria is one-nation? Nigeria is yet to be an integrated nation! Hope is not lost!

### **Diversity is Not Peculiar to Nigeria**

Some nations that were once like Nigeria, have fully integrated their peoples. Such countries as the U.S.A. or the former U.S.S.R., Great Britain or Switzerland, have their differences of physical and social environments. The people of the U.S.A. are composed of many different cultural types -Europeans, Scandinavians, Africans, Indians, Spanish, Eskimos, etc. Those of the former U.S.S.R. (a multi-national federation like Nigeria) used as many as 180 different languages and dialects before the disintegration; Great Britain, is composed of people with distinct cultures from Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England; the people of Switzerland live in a country where three different languages are in everyday use - French, German and Italian - most Swiss people are familiar with at least two of these languages. Most of these countries have overcome the language barrier - one of the strongest factors that cause suspicion between peoples. Hopefully, Nigeria will one day join these countries. How soon? I don't know.

### **Unifying Factors**

Nigeria needs to unite and integrate her peoples. There was some form of unity among these ethnic groups before the advent of the British and colonialism. We need to build on the earlier unity. Among the unifying factors today are:

1. Economic Ties: Farming of various kinds is practiced throughout Nigeria; minerals are scattered throughout the highland and delta regions; the products of the farms from the forests, the mines and the oilfields are required by all Nigerians. No one state in the federation is able to produce all the food or manufactured products required by its population, so the economic unity of Nigeria is strengthened by the fact that the peoples of the various states have to trade their surplus produce for items they require that have been produced in the more distant regions of the country. Trade between the north and south existed long before the Europeans took over the administration and the creation of Nigeria as a modern state. Since that time, however, trade contact has been facilitated by the development of communication links such as roads, railways, waterways, motorised vehicles, etc.
2. **Cultural Ties:** Although the various ethnic groups in Nigeria have their distinct cultures, it is not news that they share many common cultural traits which can be observed in the following:
  - (a) Naming ceremonies
  - (b) Marriage ceremonies
  - (c) Installation ceremonies
  - (d) Funeral rites
  - (e) Religion.
  - (f) Divination  
Arts and Crafts

The cultural traits held in common by the peoples of Nigeria are so numerous that some scholars have suggested that the ancestors of the Nigerian peoples in the distant past probably belonged to a single cultural zone, that is, in the period before they separated into different linguistic groups. It is interesting that many Nigerian peoples traditionally claim that their ancestors came from the East, North or North-East.

3. Historical! **Ties:** Further evidence from archeology has supported the idea that the cultural ties which bind the peoples of Nigeria together have their roots in history. The early cultural centers such as NOK, the Lake Chad Basin, Igbo-Ukwu, Ife, Benin and Oyo have been found to have many things in common.

Before the coming of the Europeans in the fifteenth century, there existed social and other forms of contacts among the various groups that inhabited the area of modern Nigeria. There is ample evidence in support of this view in the oral histories of the many lineages or dynasties found all over the country. For example, there is relationships between the rulers of Benin and that of Yorubaland; the Itsekiri, the Western Ibo and a few Eastern Ibo such as the Onitsha and Oguta are said to have migrated from Benin; the Igala dynasty is similarly related to the Yoruba, while the Nupe dynasty derived from Igala. There are also traditions which claim that the descendants of those who established the monarchies in Kanem-Bornu and Hausaland gave rise to the kingdoms of Jukun, Nupe, Idah and Borgu.

Although there have been contacts before the Europeans came and eventual amalgamation of Southern and Northern Protectorates into the geo-political entity called Nigeria today, real integration has not taken place. There have been many obstacles to it.

## **Obstacles to National Integration**

### **1. Tribal (Ethnic) Allegiance:**

Nigeria is a land of many people's with diverse cultures and many ethnic groups, some of which are Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Fulani, Ibibio, Kanuri, Tiv, Edo, Urhobo, Itsekiri, Nupe and Ijaw. These ethnic groups pay allegiance to their groups rather than "to Nigeria as a nation. There are" the Arewa Consultative Assembly concerned with furthering the interests of the north, the Odua People's Congress for the Yorubas, the Ohaneze N'digbo for the Ibos and other ethnic groups going by different names.

### **2. Different Languages:**

The more than 250 ethnic groups inhabiting Nigeria have their different languages for communication among themselves. This has not helped matters. Although English language is the official language of Nigeria and was inherited from the British colonial masters, a majority of Nigerians cannot speak it at all or correctly. This group rely on their tribal languages or dialects as means of communication. Different languages to me is the greatest corrosive force that erodes nationalism and integration, as people relate better and trust only those who speak the same tribal language with them. .

### **3. Uneven Location of Natural Resources**

the petroleum resources that the country depends on are located in the Niger Delta that is inhabited by minority groups in Nigeria. The people of this area are clamoring for the total control of these resources because of the immense benefits derivable from it. That area has never known peace for some time now.

### **4. Fear of Domination of Minority by Majority Tribes**

There are three major tribes in Nigeria - Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba. These major tribes would swallow the minority if integration was to take place because of the number of majority as compared to the population of the minority. The minority will not fold their arms and watch being swallowed up by the majority ethnic groups.

### **5. Different Religious Beliefs**

The two major religions in Nigeria are Christianity and Islam, and are suspicious of each other. Many riots as a result of different beliefs have taken place in Nigeria many times resulting in the loss of lives and properties. Integration cannot exist in a situation like this, and something has to be done.

## **Social Studies as Instrument of National Integration**

Social Studies as earlier defined is an organized, integrated study of man and his environment, both physical and social, emphasizing on cognition, functional skills and desirable attitudes and actions for the purpose of producing an effective citizenry is and should be a tool for national integration. Even the definition of Social Studies by Kissock (1981), as a programme of study which a society uses to instill in students the knowledge, skills and actions it considers important concerning the relationships human beings have with each other, their world and themselves is also supporting' the definition of Olojobou. Therefore, its importance cannot be overemphasized considering the fact that national integration has eluded Nigerians since Nigeria appeared as a geo-political entity in 1914. The various governments that have ruled Nigeria since independence have been trying to solve this, problem, but have met with minimum success. Their efforts included setting up of the Federal Character Commission with the responsibility of ensuring that employment and appointments reflect federal character; Unity Secondary Schools across the nation which became a forum for integration among the various ethnic groups in the country; the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) established by decree on 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 1973.

The desirable attitude of integration must be imbibed by all Nigerians using Social Studies as the instrument. Hopefully, those conditions Bhatia and Narang (1984), stated which an integrated nation must meet will be achieved by Nigeria if she is to know peace and prosperity.

Our educational institutions - Schools, Colleges and Universities - have a major role to play in this aspect. The teachers in these institutions should be alive to their responsibilities. They know the methods to use to help achieve the objectives of Social Studies. The attitude of Nigerians must change and the teacher and institutions are the most important agents to make this possible and should be encouraged by governments and individuals.

## **Recommendations**

1. Social Studies as a subject is taught at the primary and Junior Secondary School levels of our educational system. Recently, it has been extended to the tertiary institutions. Unfortunately it is not taught at the Senior Secondary Schools in Nigeria. The government should make a law that it, should be taught at this level because those used by perpetrators of clashes in Nigeria fall between 14 and 18 years old. The social studies they learnt at the primary and junior secondary school levels is not enough to discourage them from these atrocities. It should be made compulsory in the WAEC and NECO exams. The syllabus at this level should include citizenship and integration.
2. In most primary and junior secondary schools where social studies is taught now, laboratories are

not available and where available, there are inadequate instructional materials. The laboratory or social studies library should be well equipped.

3. The Social Studies teacher must continuously be trained and retrained and teachers from related disciplines should be encouraged to teach the subject.
4. Scholarships should be awarded to those wishing to study the subject at a higher level.
5. One way to encourage integration as stated in the constitution is the encouragement of inter-tribal marriages. Government officials should set the example and let citizens be aware of it.
6. When laws are made to support integration, the laws must be enforced by government. Mere promulgation of the laws is not enough.

### **Conclusion**

Social Studies, as a subject in Nigerian schools is without doubt an instrument for national integration. All topics at the primary and junior secondary schools are geared towards becoming good citizens of the country and willingness to support national integration is a mark of good citizenship. Social studies has the best potential of producing citizens with desirable attitudes and actions that will promote national integration of the citizens of the nation.

The Nigerian Educational Research Council (NERC) (1983), stated that the content of primary school Social Studies is said to be able to change the behaviours of pupils to acceptable beliefs and attitudes that are acceptable in our society.

One of the objectives of the post-primary Social Studies syllabus is to make the student a good citizen.

If the administrators and teachers in our school system would really do their work sincerely, Nigeria would one day become an integrated nation using Social Studies as the key.

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