

VISION AND MISSION OF SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

The introduction of Social Studies in Nigeria was part of the efforts to make school subject relevant to the needs and aspirations of the Nigerian society. In this paper, attempt was made to examine the vision and mission of social studies education in the 21st century Nigeria. The major challenges of the 21st century was discussed to accommodate institutionalisation of democracy, population growth, globalisation and the professionalization of teaching. Against that background, some workable recommendations were made that can enable the individual and the society at large to benefit from Social Studies education in Nigeria.

Introduction

Social Studies education is as old mankind. Elements of social studies had been part of the traditional education system. However, the modern Social Studies was introduced out of (he needs to make education and school curriculum, in particular, relevant to the needs and aspirations of Nigerian society. For clarity of purpose and to understand the vision and mission of social studies education in the 21st century, there is a need to briefly explain the meaning of Social Studies and explain the sociopolitical circumstances that led to the introduction of Social Studies Education in Nigerian educational system.

The Meaning of Social Studies

There is divergence among various social studies educators on the meaning of social studies. However, despite these views, there is seemingly what can be referred to as consensus. This consensus, according to Akinlaye (1985:5), is the belief that social studies grew out of the need to:

- i. make education more relevant to the needs of the individuals and society,
- ii. use education for national integration, social and economic development.
- iii. develop the right societal values and
- iv. make an individual responsive to the society in which he lives.

Social Studies educators, therefore, have conceptualised social studies in different ways. For example, Dubey and Barth (1980) conceptualise social studies as a set of goals which describe how citizenship education content should be selected and taught. They also explain that social studies has at least three traditions- either taught as citizenship transmission, or as reflective inquiry or as social science and history.

Kissock (1981) conceptualises Social Studies as a programme through which society instils in its younger ones knowledge, skills, values and desirable attitudes which it considers worthwhile. He categorically states that Social Studies is introduced into countries with specific missions depending on the priorities and needs of the country at a specific time. For instance, it was introduced in Britain for citizenship; in Tanzania, to enforce the philosophy of self-reliance and in Uganda to improve the self image of people after colonial rule.

The Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) (1982) describes Social Studies as a subject that

...begins by describing the family as the first unit of the community. This is a subject about which all children have some firsthand experience. It develops the theme by next describing the school community, the national community, and finally shows how these communities relate to the larger world.

In Nigeria, social studies was introduced specifically, according to Dubey and Barth (1980), to heal the wounds of Nigerian civil war and nurture hope and consciousness among the citizens. This was reflected in the main objectives of primary, junior and senior secondary schools. The flexibility of social studies gives it an advantage over other school subjects to accommodate new fields or themes such as Environmental Education, Population Education, Drug Education and HIV/AIDS Education.

The Vision of Social Studies Education

According to Obani (1998) vision can be defined as a process of direction setting; it is a concept for

a new and desirable future reality. However, ordinarily, vision is the act of seeing with naked eyes. In this paper, vision is conceptualized as mental perception, aim, concept or idea.

The national objectives as stated in the National Policy on Education (2004) provides the platform for the vision of social studies education in Nigeria. These objectives are stated as:

- i. Free and democratic society
- ii. A just and egalitarian society
- iii. A united, strong and self-reliant nation
- iv. A great and dynamic economy
- v. A land of bright and full opportunities for all the citizens.

The above national objectives provided the basis for policy statements that further elucidate the vision of Social Studies Education. The national objectives and the policy statements were out of the strong belief that education would be used as an instrument par excellence for socio-economic transformation of the society. The National Policy additionally conceded that "no country can go beyond its curriculum".

The following policy statements were made which have direct bearing with Social Studies Education.

- i. Inculcation of national consciousness and unity.
- ii. The inculcation of the right types of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society.
- 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 society.

On the basis of the above, the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) and Centre for Education Study and Adaptation Centre (CESAC) on the other hand produced teacher guide for Junior secondary schools and later produced the syllabus of Junior secondary school (JSS) in 1982 and Senior Secondary Schools in 1985.

Social Studies was identified as a course of study with broad-based social education components which integrates concepts, facts and generalisations from the traditional discipline. This was echoed by Akinlaye (1985) as "to help young people to understand the modern world and the part they will play in it and to prepare them for the future... Every child lives in time, space and in society and the tasks of school subject is to help him make adjustment to them".

Therefore, the vision of Social Studies Education reflects that of the national objectives and the policy statement that follows. Social Studies is a vehicle that would be used to bring about redress and to make young people become aware of worldwide cooperation, inculcate in them an attitude of mind that considers the interest of mankind as a whole.

The Mission of Social Studies Education

According to Lassa (1981), mission refers to an objective in life arising from a conviction or a sense of calling. Mission involves the actualisation of vision which is more practical than conceptual. Therefore, vision and mission are two related concepts that are inseparable.

The specific task of Social Studies differs from society to society because the problems, priorities and needs of societies differ. In Nigeria, the Social Studies Association of Nigeria, as in Dubey and Barth (1980), opines that Social Studies in school is to, among others,

- (i) create an awareness and an understanding of our social and physical environment in order to conserve it for national development;
 - (ii) develop a capacity to learn and acquire certain basic skills, of literacy, numeracy and critical thinking essential to the forming of sound judgement concerning social, economic and political issues;
 - (iv) teach the learner to acquire a relevant body of knowledge and information necessary for personal judgement, development and contribution to the betterment of mankind;
 - fv) develop appreciation for the diverse nature and interdependence of Nigerian communities under national and international communities; and
- develop students' positive attitudes towards the spirit of friendliness and cooperation necessary for a healthy nation and to inculcate appropriate values of honesty, integrity, fairness and justice.

The above mission have been further translated into series of objectives of Social Studies in primary, junior and senior secondary schools (Dubey and Earth, 1980).

The background of the mission of Social Studies Education in Nigeria can be traced to the African

Education Ministers conference in Mombassa. 1968. The formation of African Social Studies Programmes (ASSP) in 1969 further provided impetus to the growth and development of Social Studies Education in Nigeria. Social Studies was to be used to achieve the national objectives such as unity, peaceful coexistence, honesty, integrity, patriotism and awareness. However, these continued to remain the main emphasis of Social Studies Education in post civil war Nigeria.

Social Studies Education and the Challenges of the 21st Century Nigeria (i) The Political Scene

Nigeria has been under the military for last decades, it has only returned to democracy at the end of the 20th century. The spillover problems of military rule might be manifested in the 21st century. This is clearly stated by Gambari (1999) when he says that,

In Nigeria, after several years of military rule punctuated by democratic disposition, there is an urgent need for massive and sustained political education. There is much to be learned by the Legislative which suffered most from the absence of democracy and the Executive whose instinct is to centralise and command as a result of prolonged military rule.

It is true that the dawn of the 21st century saw Nigeria on the path of greatness, on the path of democracy and responsible leadership. This is obviously in the midst of ignorance, illiteracy and poverty. Therefore, massive political education is needed. Against that background, Joof (1985) remarks that the new Social Studies should help the learner to think rationally and act wisely. It must be based on rational thinking not on superstition and ignorance.

(ii) **The Social Scene**

The 21st century would have a spillover effects of various social problems which might have been generated by underdevelopment. For instance, Gambari (1999) remarked that,

The urban bias in development has left great number of the fellowship ignorant, illiterate and aggrieved in the country side.... These youths are often recruited as vanguard or in the name of state police or trial police, etc. that could be used to facilitate political victory by unpopular candidates.

The other side of social crises are evident in forms of HIV/AIDS, child trafficking, religious crises, prostitutions, etc. Social Studies Education should help individuals to think rationally and become aware of the effect of their actions on their quality of life.

(iii) **Population Growth**

Social Studies Education must recognize the outrageous growth of population of school-going age children as once remarked by Okebukola in Lassa (1998). This would eventually reflect in the growth of class size. Coupled with this is the increasing number of under aged pupils in our schools.

Teachers should also think of grappling with problems of delinquency, absenteeism and truancy. Teacher-pupil contact may be minimal which can obviously impede effective teaching.

The population pressure may also affect the availability and adequacy of teaching facilities. Available text books and other teaching facilities may be seriously inadequate.

(iv) **Globalisation**

The advancement of science and technology have further bridged the distance of nations and states. Social and other problems can easily be transmitted through these gadgets. Information and images about societies, right or wrong, can easily be transmitted. Teachers must therefore rise to these challenges by keeping abreast themselves of modern information technology gadgets such as the computer and the internet.

(v) **Educational Policies**

Another challenge of the 21st century as remarked by Lassa (1998) is the spill over of failed educational policies. Such policies like "education for all" or "literacy for all" have failed. Teachers should recognise the impediments of these policies.

This is also noticeable in the area of teaching qualification and professionalism. It was once opined that the minimum teaching qualification in Nigeria would be the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE). It must however be noted that up to today many states of the federation are grappling with unqualified teachers in their schools.

Recommendations

Social Studies Education has a very significant role to play, particularly, in a rapidly changing society like Nigeria. In the light of the vision and mission and challenges examined, the following recommendations can be made.

- (i) The Inquiry Approach:** Evidence has shown that classroom practices must change in order to reflect the changing needs of the society; traditional teaching approaches have no place in Social Studies for the 21st century. If we must teach children, we must teach them how to learn so that they can discover by themselves, respect evidence and be able to make decision in the light of evidence.
- (ii) Professionalisation of Teaching:** This paper is not intended to argue whether teaching is a profession or not but the truth is that the earlier it is professionalised, the better. Teaching may be the only profession where anybody can be employed without any induction or training. Social Studies Education in particular is unique. It has its own philosophy, objectives and methods. Therefore, to derive maximum benefits of Social Studies Education in the 21st century, only trained teachers should be allowed to teach it in our schools.
- (iii) General Education:** No one is likely to argue, the fact that a proper understanding of man should be from diverse angles not from one angle as obtained in separate schools subject. A solution provided from this perspective may likely be better because it represents a wholistic view. Social problems in the 21st century may not respect subject boundary when one considers social problems such as child trafficking, drug abuse, prostitution, HIV/AIDS, etc. School subjects must therefore de-emphasise subject boundary to enable them function in the 21st century.
- (iv) Social Studies Education in the Secondary Schools:** The National Policy on Education recognised the significance of Social Studies by making it a compulsory school subject in primary and junior secondary schools. There is an urgent need to introduce Social Studies Education as a school subject in the senior secondary schools. The senior secondary schools' syllabus had since been drafted in 1986 but it was only implemented by technical colleges.

Conclusion

Attempt has been made in this paper to examine the vision and mission of Social Studies Education. Social Studies Education derives its impetus from the socio-political realities of societies. It is an integrated subject area that has a place not only in Nigeria but in all parts of the world because it can be adopted to solve unique societal problems. The political, social and economic problems of Nigeria suggest more of Social Studies in the 21st century,

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