

ROLE OF SOCIAL STUDIES IN THE PROMOTION OF INTER-ETHNIC UNDERSTANDING AMONG THE PEOPLE OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

Social studies education is a field of study that inculcates in the individual the ability to cope with various life problems. The paper therefore examines social studies education in the context of its importance to Nigeria's philosophical goals as a nation, the objectives of social studies education in the school system and how they can be used to achieve inter-ethnic understanding among the people of Nigeria. Promotion of value awareness, teaching of basic level of social studies for good citizenship education, tolerance, peaceful co-existence for a proper inter-ethnic understanding among the people of Nigeria are proffered in the study.

Keywords: Role, Social Studies, Promotion, Inter-Ethnic Understanding, Nigeria.

Social studies in Nigeria and even in Africa is a superlative. It is seen as a corrective discipline whose emphasis is on the school child's understanding of human interaction with culture, social and physical, development of necessary skills and positive attitude expected of a good citizenry. According to Coe, in Edinyang, Unimke, and Ubi, (2015), social studies is seen as a discipline that helps students become responsible citizens in a culturally diverse, democratic society within an interdependent world. Ololobu (1985) in Grace(2010) perceived this subject area as an organized integrated study of man and his environment both physical and social, emphasizing on cognition, functional skills and desirable attitude and actions for the purpose of producing an effective citizenry. Social studies was introduced into school curricula following the 1968 Mombassa conference where African Social Studies Programme (ASSP) was launched as a continental strategy for citizenship training, the emergent quest for nation building and national development (Ogunyemi, 2003) in Ahmad (2013). The introduction of social studies in Nigeria was mainly to inculcate concept of nationalism, unity in diversity and interdependence among the citizens of the new nation. Right from its introduction into the curriculum of Nigerian schools, the potentials of the social studies programme in promoting values, ethics of inter-ethnic understanding has never been in doubt (Garba, 2013). The primary goal of this paper therefore is to examine how social studies have contributed in promoting inter-ethnic understanding among the people of Nigeria.

Conceptual Definitions

The following variables are explained as used in the study:

- i. **Role:** The function or position to which social studies occupying the promotion of ethnic understanding among the people of Nigeria.
- ii. **Social Studies:** A programme of study which a society uses to instill in students the knowledge, attitudes and actions which it considers important, concerning the relationship human

beings have with each other, their world and themselves. Social studies is an area of curriculum designed specifically for the study of man and how his problems could be solved within the immediate environment, not only concern with using timely and necessary curriculum content that students perceive as being relevant, but pre-eminently emphasized the need for helping pupils develop the competencies and attitude essential for democratic living.

iii. **Promotion:** Raising the citizen's awareness or encouraging a cause for togetherness within the ethnic groupings.

iv. **Inter-ethnic:** Characteristics of the different groupings in Nigeria and distinctive cultures, religion, and language.

v. **Understanding:** Having insight or good judgments and awareness of other people and tolerance.

Social Studies Objectives and Nigerian Philosophical Goals

In order to understand the role of social studies in the promotion of inter-ethnic understanding in Nigeria, it is pertinent to review the objectives for introducing social studies in Nigerian schools. The objectives of social studies in the primary and secondary schools clearly indicate that the subject is taught to (FRN, 2008);

i. Develop the learner's capacity to learn and acquire basic skills including those of listening, reading, writing, speaking, calculation and observation, analysis and inference which are essential to the formation of sound inter-ethnic relationship.

ii. Socializing and humanizing the individual child to enable him interact freely with children from other ethnic groups.

iii. Create an awareness and understanding of the evolving social and physical environment.

iv. Ensure the acquisition of that relevant knowledge which is an essential pre-requisite to personal development as well as to a positive personal contribution to the betterment of mankind and the Nigerian society all large.

v. Develop a sympathetic appreciation of the diversity and interdependence of all local communities and the wider national and international community.

vi. Develop in children a positive attitude to citizenship and a desire in them to make a positive personal contribution to the creation of a united Nigeria, through appreciation of values of honesty, hard work, fairness, justice and togetherness. This objective is aimed at establishing a sound understanding toward inter-ethnic interaction in Nigeria.

vii. Encourage learners to appreciate that all the things they have learnt are inter-related. Through social studies it is possible to present knowledge as a whole instead of as a series of specialized fragments as stated in the objective which says "social studies is taught to develop a sympathetic appreciation of the diversity and interdependence of all local communities and the wider national and international community". This is because the subject studies the need for all and sundry to contribute towards the good of the society they live, to be their brother keeper, respect the rights and personality of others. Objectives of the secondary school social studies clearly show that social studies are a fertile ground for the promotion of inter-ethnic understanding amongst Nigerians. Because social studies is built on developing competencies critical to effective citizenship, the Nigerian philosophical

goals and objectives become very important in achieving the philosophy and objectives of the nation. The main National objectives of Nigeria as stated in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2008).

1. A free and democratic society
2. A just and egalitarian society
3. A united, strong and self-reliant nation
4. A great and dynamic economy
5. A land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens

The above national developmental objectives of Nigeria are linked to philosophy of the integration of the individual into a sound and effective citizen and the provision of equal opportunities for all citizens for the nation at the basic secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system (FRN, 2008). More so the national education objectives that are related to Nigeria philosophy of education which helps to promote inter-ethnic understanding are;

- i. The inculcation of the right type of value and attitude for the survival of the individual and the Nigeria society.
- ii. The training of mind in the understanding of the world around, and
- iii. The acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competence both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live in a contribute to development of his society. (FRN, 2010).

Social studies compliment other social institutions such as family, polity, marriage and religion, in promoting social actions for change in the drive towards national consciousness and integration. Social studies provide ample opportunities for the promotion of the much needed inter-ethnic understanding as it provides pupils with problem solving skills. In social studies, learners learn about the lives of achievers and great men from the different ethnic groups and this serve as models for the younger generation. Social studies helps in the promotion of inter-ethnic understanding amongst the people of Nigeria by emphasizing that no manor community is self-sufficient and that for survival of Nigeria as a nation, we have to depend on exchange of goods and services as well as culture, thereby learning directly through peaceful co-existence and understanding among the citizens irrespective of religion or culture (Nwanna-Nzewunwa, 2006).

The Role of Social Studies in the Promotion of Inter-Ethnic Understanding amongst the People of Nigeria

The content of social studies education attempts to forge unity, inter-dependence amongst the people of Nigeria, thereby fostering inter-ethnic understanding which is essential to the development or Nigeria as a nation. Social studies is aimed at helping young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good in a cultural diverse, democratic society and interdependent world (Yasuf, in Armad, 2013). More so, Nigeria is inhabited by a large number of ethnic groups ranging in size from a few thousands to many millions, between them with over 350 languages and ethnic nationalities. Thus, right from 1960 when Nigeria attained independence she had been pre-occupied with how to achieve a reasonable level of inter-ethnic understanding and cooperation which will bring about much needed peace and unity in Nigeria (Atang, 2013). Social studies education has contributed in achieving inter-ethnic understanding through the inculcation of local languages in teaching from the primary to lower middle education in Nigeria thereby transforming Nigeria into a modern state (FRN2008:p19). It should be noted that the three major

languages Hausa, Yoruba and Igbos are not only accepted as national languages but are also taught in schools. The adoption of a federal rigid constitution is one measure meant to achieve what is popularly referred to as unity in diversity. In essence, federalism is way of decentralizing political authority to ensure all interest safeguarded in heterogeneous society. (Imobigbe in Atang, 2013).By this act, social studies education has contributed in healing the social and political wounds of the past decades, nurturing the most recent hopes in good inter-ethnic relationship and nationalism, and engendering constructive reforms to make the nation a just and progressive society.

Social studies also help to foster inter-ethnic understanding through citizenship education, whereby cultures of certain behaviours, knowledge, outlook and values found in the culture which the individual participate. A as used in this case, refers to one who is a legal member of a state and who conforms to certain accepted practices, hold a particular belief that is loyal to certain values, generally acceptable to the generality of the community, participate in certain activities and conforms to norms and values of such an environment. Mezieobi and Edinyang (2013) have explained the validity for the establishment of unity schools such as federal colleges in all states of the federation by the federal government of Nigeria. According to them, unity schools provide opportunity for children from different ethnic backgrounds to mix and interact with one another and thus gain a better understanding of Nigeria ethnic groups which seek to promote inter-ethnic understanding. This also encourages multi-cultural education in Nigeria. They also maintain that it developed comprehensive integrated school curricula feasible for projecting Nigerian indigenous cultural education. Hence, it imbues the learner with sustainable values, skills and knowledge for individual development, societal advancement, harmonious coexistence, social progress, national unity and realistic patriotic feelings for achieving enduring effective nation building in Nigeria (Mofarland, 2002).

The introduction of national youth services corps (NYSC) programme by the Gowon administration of 1973 and of course the entrenchment of the principle of federal character in 1979 constitution in line with the objectives of social studies education which states that social studies is aimed at sensitizing the gains of national unity through patriotism, national consciousness and attitude for peaceful co-existence thus promoting inter-ethnic understanding in Nigeria. The principle of federal character ensures broad participation and interaction among the ethnic groups, essence of these measures was to widen platform for interactions, all these bring about encouragement of inter-ethnic collaboration in business, in friendship as well as marriages, amongst people from different ethnic groups thereby fostering peaceful co-existence. The study of social studies enables youths to acquire skills for solving societal and environmental problems as well as acquiring the spirit of sportsmanship. Sport is an undisputable factor in bringing about cooperation, interdependence healthy interactions and inter-ethnic understanding amongst people in the society (Egomo 2011).

One of the specific aims of establishing social studies, according to Mezieobi and Edinyang (2013), is to identify and appreciate the cultural similarities and differences of the people of Nigeria. Thus across cultural interaction through the introduction of national festival of art and culture (NAFAC). It makes citizens understand and interact and further play the role of making the people appreciate their art, craft and respect the cultural diversity and to realize the need for cooperation. More to these is the introduction of national carnivals which encourages interaction and understanding, where there is opportunity for cross cultural promotion. No wonder Mezieobi and Edinyang (2013), opine that social studies have helped to liberate the individual to adjust, adapt, and

accommodate varying ethnic groups in Nigeria. This has contributed to the socio-economic, socio-political and socio technological advancement of the nation.

Challenging Issues in the Promotion of Inter-Ethnic Understanding

1. Ethnic distribution of political leaders. Inter-ethnic struggle for political power and power sharing especially among the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria thereby undermining the minority does not give room for a proper inter-ethnic understanding amongst Nigerians inter-ethnic socio-economic competition.
2. Regionalization of National Wealth. The image of Nigerian politics is reinforced by contemporary bourgeois definition of politics which view it as authoritative allocation of values which used in definition is not restricted to resources but refers widely to choice or decisions, in practice it's been interpreted to mean resources. Nigerian politics have presented an image of a struggle among the various ethnic groups for division of national resources. Most Nigerians have come to believe that unless their "own men" are in government they are unable to secure those socio-economic amenities that are disused by the government. Hence even the government decision on federal character in the civil service for a proper promotion of inter-ethnic understanding is distorted. Nnoli (1999).
3. State of origin syndrome; the issue of state of origin emphasize, where it concerns employment admissions etc distort inter-ethnic understanding.
4. Issue of resource control has resurfaced with the federal government re-introducing the offshore/onshore dichotomy. Federal government action on offshore/onshore issue threatens inter-ethnic understanding. If Nigeria practice true federalism most of these won't be there example structural imbalance, injustice etc.
5. Most recently is the issue of insecurity where most Nigerians are deprived of their stay in some parts of the country mostly affected is the NYSC programme. Where coppers cannot freely be posted to some areas as a result of insurgency, it also kills the spirit of proper federal character as workers in most of these areas mostly affected fear to stay thereby thwarting the purpose of social studies in the promotion of inter-ethnic understanding amongst the people of Nigeria.

Conclusion

Social studies education play's a very vital role in developing rational thinking ability for practical social life, promotion of political literacy, encourage democratic values and principles for the promotion of functional citizenship. It also enables citizens to develop positive attitude towards other people, encourages peaceful co-existence which leads to the promotion of inter-ethnic understanding amongst the people of Nigeria. In order to encourage the stability and tranquility of the Nigerian nation as well as encourage inter-ethnic understanding, the following suggestions are made;

Suggestions

- i. To enhance social interaction among the citizens, there is need for teaching the basic levels of social studies such as citizenship education, national integration, tolerance, values etc.
- ii. Promoting value awareness and tackling dynamic problems in the society by identifying and solving social problems using problem solving techniques.

- iii. Seminars, workshops, enlightenment campaigns should be organized for in-and-out-of-school people on ways of promoting inter-ethnic understanding.
- iv. Government should tackle the issue of security for protection of lives and property of Nigerians as they co-exist in different areas of the country as a result of inter-ethnic understanding.

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