

# **PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SOCIAL STUDIES AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES CURRICULA**

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## **Abstract**

For any country to be developed a good enabling environment is a sine qua non. There can be no meaningful development therefore when corruption which is the breeding house for social vices rears its ugly head unabated. Curriculum planners in Nigeria are aware of this and have made deliberate efforts to produce curriculum that could address issues of corruption and by so doing curtail social vices in the Nigerian polity. The primary school curriculum in subjects such as religious and social studies are geared towards producing children of strong character in a corrupt free society. Unfortunately however, corruption though a universal phenomenon has assumed an alarming and obnoxious proportion in Nigeria. This paper x-rays Nigerian primary school curriculum in these two key subject areas with the view to identifying weak areas which could be strengthened in our quest for a corrupt free Nigeria. It was discovered that though the content of the two subjects are strong and adequate enough to achieve the set objectives of a corrupt free Nigeria, the strategies suggested for use are not good enough. It is suggested that participatory approaches which are capable of creating an atmosphere for experience sharing and social networking should be adopted.

## **Introduction**

The broad aim of the curriculum development anywhere in the world is the development of humanity vis-à-vis the environment human beings live in. To achieve this programme, contents are drawn out, targeting a specific area and strategies for realizing the programmes developed. A free Nigerian society, devoid of criminal leaders and followers who perpetrate social vices is one of the cardinal aims of the social studies and religious instruction curricula. Since independence series of reviews have been carried out in our curriculum including those of these two subject areas, yet the dream of a corrupt free Nigeria seems far fetched. In fact, corruption and its attendant social vices has assumed such an alarming proportion that programmes outside the classroom wall have been mounted by several regimes to checkmate it. The results recorded so far are not too encouraging and this has made social development run a rat race in the country.

The need arises therefore to take a look at our social studies and religious curricula to identify weak areas that could be improved upon to create the necessary enabling environment for social change. It must be stressed here that one of the major obstacles against social change in Nigeria is corruption and any

improvement made in our curriculum should be that which is capable of reducing the rate of corruption in the country.

### **Social Change**

According to Vries (1961);

Social change is such as prevalent and often disturbing feature of contemporary life that both the specialist and the layman may be tempted to suppose that it is peculiarly modern. That change at some level and degree, is a characteristic of man's life in organised system as is orderly persistence.

Paradoxically, as the rate of social change has accelerated in the real world of experience, the scientific disciplines dealing with man's actions and products have tended to emphasize orderly interdependence and static continuity. The genuine difficulties of dealing with social dynamics are in part responsible for the state of affairs.

### **Corruption in Nigeria**

The Social Science Encyclopedia (1985) defined corruption as the perversion or abandonment of a standard.

According to Ohuta (2004) in Okaneme (2005).

The word "corruption" presupposes on the one hand, that in a given system, there is a standard or blueprint of behaviour expected of persons who operate within that system. In every business or profession, institution or social system, there are rules or an agreed code of conduct which members are meant to conform to for the healthy running of the system. These guiding principles are constructed around such absolute, universal and eternal values such as honesty, uprightness, decency and modesty.

Corruption therefore is an immoral and illegal act capable of destroying any given society. Though corruption is a universal phenomenon, the level of its practices and effects are far higher in the developing world such as Nigeria. Agba (2005:1) captures this when he states that:

*Corruption occurs throughout the world but its effects are more severe in the developing countries such as Nigeria. This is because those who pay and receive bribes can expropriate the nation's wealth, leaving little for its poorest citizens. It has been noted that where corruption exists, even a highly endowed nation in terms of natural resources may fail to develop in a beneficial way to a great majority of the citizens. Nigeria clearly demonstrates this type of society. Corruption is inherently seen to be evil and thus it is usually a cause for concern for the society at large and the policy makers in particular.*

Achebe (1983:38) painfully laments that:

*Nigeria is so corrupt that keeping an average Nigerian from being corrupt is like preventing a goat from eating yam.*

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Okolo (1994:74) choruses this emphatically when he states that;  
*What is also characteristic of the Nigerian is his lack of the true notion of the “common good”. The proverbial and often vaunted “national cake” in the estimation of the average person is something “out there” to be share out for self and for one’s family and friends. The notion of the good of the society or the general good becomes illusory and of no one’s concern.*

According to Okaneme (2008:5);

Corruption is a perennial and hydra headed problem in the country. It manifests itself in all facets of our national life. Indeed it seems that corruption has become part of our existence. In politics, it is there. It accounts for the reason why so many Nigerians are abandoning their businesses and jobs to go into politics. This is because of their strong belief that in Nigerian politics is the easiest way to achieve quick fame and wealth. Even Nigerians is all about have all become politicians overnight, seeking for opportunities to feather their own nests.

Corruption in Nigeria has become a household phenomenon, particularly since the independence in 1960. The story has been the same, be it the armed force ruling council or the executive and legislative arms of democratic government. Though ex-President Obasanjo for instance set out to fight the scourge of corruption, his eight-year rule ended up being one of the most corrupt administrations in the nation’s history. Currently, some former political office holders are standing trial in various courts in the country for corrupt practices perpetrated by them while they were in office. It is these corrupt practices perpetrated by political office holders while in office that has sparked off the clamour by Nigerians that the ‘immunity clause’ in the constitution be removed so that the president or State Governors could face trial for any misdemeanour or the crime committed while still in office. It is important to note that these leaders, be they civilians or military leaders all passed through the four walls of a primary schools which operated a curriculum that would have produced corrupt free leaders in a corrupt free society.

The offices are not left out. The situation in offices is summarised by Okaneme when he narrated that;

In the offices, corruption is not in short supply. From the Gateman to the Clerk down to the Director General and Permanent Secretary, the story is the same. Before the Gateman opens the gate for you, he expects you to “grease his palm”. When your file gets to office where it is to be treated, it gets ‘lost’ and for it to be ‘found’, you have to part with something, usually money. When you come to an office to see the Director General or Permanent Secretary, his Secretary could tell you that he is either no in the office or very busy and cannot see you. Part with some Naira notes and you will be ushered into his office with dispatch.

Our churches are not even left out. It is not a hidden secret that some Men of God defraud unsuspecting worshippers of their hard earned money through unreasonable demand for tithes. Some churches even give recognition to

wealthy worshipers whose sources of income are known to be unhealthy by the public.

The financial institutions are not spared. Many sharp practices go on in our banks unchecked. Some cashiers in some banks will always find a way of removing some currency notes from wraps of monies withdrawn by unsuspecting customers especially customers withdrawing large amount of cash who may not be disposed to counting such monies withdrawn in the banking halls. Many Nigerians who have taken loans in the past have one sad tale or the other. Or banks officials have formed a clever habit of not explaining the details of these loans to customers. However, as soon as these loans are given, many withdrawals take place to the embarrassment of such helpless customers.

Our universities are not left out as regards corrupt practices. In fact, the level of corruption in the ivory tower is so shocking that one easily develops nausea when one comes face to face with it. Okaneme laments the situation when he wondered how one can explain the corruption that go on in our university in the name of admission racketeering. According to him, many candidates pay through their nose to secure admission to our universities. He alleged that some departments demand up to One Hundred Thousand Naira and above to offer admission to their would-be students. In some cases, would-be students are asked to bring fans, buckets of paints and other items before they are given admission.

The serious effect of corruption on Nigeria and Nigerians is no longer a point of controversy. Every Nigerian both at home and abroad is seen as corrupt and criminal minded.

No wonder Odey (2001:2) says;

*“Everywhere in the world, Nigerians are generally feared like mad dogs, dreaded like criminals, cautiously approached like dangerous snakes and avoided like lepers.*

Nigerians who have travelled to other countries, especially European countries and America will always recount with sadness and regret the harrowing ordeal they passed through in the hands of security operatives of those countries at the point of entry simply because they are Nigerians.

It is clear from the above that most of the social ills in Nigeria are traceable to corruption. For any meaningful social change to take place in Nigeria, the issue of corruption has to be tackled head long. In fact, the fight has to start early in life, particularly the formative years. Here lies the crux of this paper. New strategy to primary school curriculum implementation is the answer. The experiential approach being advocated for the teaching of social studies and religion in Nigeria primary school will in the long run reduce the level of corruption in Nigeria.

### **The Social Studies and Religious Studies Curricula over the Years**

Social studies and religious studies curricula over the years have highlighted the issue of good citizenship and the need for harmonious living. The

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1969 curriculum conference resulted to the establishment of social studies curriculum and good citizenship education was one of its focal point. The implementation of social studies curriculum is expected to produce good citizens who are visualized as possessing certain desirable attributes such as looking at things with a democratic slant, believing in decency and fair play; forbearance and respect for others; commitment to an acquisition of the customs, tradition and nationalistic ideas of his country, a beliefs in the ideals of progressive improvement of society; a desire to promote the general welfare and the pledge to raise and safeguard standard of living for al, and a belief in universal education (Okam, 2002:140). The early realisation of these above qualities by the young learners would help to achieve a corrupt free society.

The National Policy on Education (NPE, 1998) point out that values and behavioural objectives which derive from attributes and characteristics of good citizens are as follows: a display of shared responsibility for the common good of society, a cultivation of a sense of compassion for the less fortunate, cherishing a sense of respect and tolerance for others, a cultivation of social attitudes and values such as cooperation, participation, honesty, interdependence, open-mindedness, integrity, trustworthiness, diligence and obedience an acquisition of dispositions and attitudes favourable to social, cultural, physical and economic development.

These characteristics are to be taken care of by social studies content which if properly done; the country will be a corrupt free and well developed one. It has however been discovered after so many years that the implementation of the social studies curriculum which is supposed to be the pillar of t his good social change has not lived up to expectation. The religious studies too which should take care of ethical and moral aspect of the development seems not to live up to its desires. The primary school is the production of all learning, which if properly handled can result to the production of good citizens. To our dismay, corruption has reared its head out seriously in the primary school. For instance, teachers favour some children whose parents present gifts of any form to and give their children position which they do not merit. These children see this and grow with it without knowing that it's a social ill. In some schools, the selection of gifted children into gifted secondary schools is done by the Head Teacher according to parents/pupils relationships with him this act is a corrupt one which deprives the real gifted ones of their opportunities. Social studies and religious teachers are therefore advised to adopt the following strategies and approaches advocated in this paper.

#### **Strategies for Teaching Social Studies and Religious Studies**

This part of the paper is advocating and emphasising general creativity, the ability to innovate and be resourceful. The strategy is therefore aimed at

- Developing in children sharp sense of creativity and adequate use of their imagination.

- Developing children's sense of judgment so that they can through role play identify factors that shape people's behaviour, especially the negative ones.
- Developing in children creative and reflective thinking which will assist them to fish out how factors bringing about negative behaviours can be tackled.
- Helping children to enrich their experience in life by stimulating them to enter into all kinds of situations imaginatively, thereby helping them to increase the awareness of their environment and deepening the level of understanding of people and situations around them.
- Developing children's personality through observational and role play especially those of people in leadership positions.
- Developing in the children basic communication skills so that they will be in a better position to dialogue with people in leadership positions.

The first step in our new approach to the implementation of social studies and religion is to accept the fact that the world is an aggregate of persons. It operates on the basis of individuality on the one hand and that of team work on the other. Children must be made to realize the fact that there are bound to be basic differences and such differences must be regulated by the law of the land. The rule of law is one of the major thrust of the social studies and religious studies curricula. If there is rule of law, there will be no corruption and its attendant vices; and if there are no vices, there will be an enabling environment for social change.

Team work is therefore central for the internalization and practice of the rule of law through creative practical lessons. A situation (preferably a play creation and play acting session) should be created where children play leadership role and later, their performances are subjected to group analysis by the entire class. As many children as possible should be given opportunities to play the role of a leader who is confronted with several obstacles, especially those that can easily bring about corruption. In this improvisational play creating/acting situation, the child playing the role of a leader first function as an individual and second as a member of a team. This situation encourages problem solving activities through which the child becomes more confident to talk about evils such as corruption in our society and how best it can be dealt with. This approach creates a forum through which children, teachers and others can share experiences. Idea generated could be carried beyond the classroom wall as children are encouraged to discuss arising critical issues from the process with their parents at home. This will not only create the necessary awareness against corruption but sensitize all those involved-the children, teacher and parents towards evils of corruption and the necessary strategy towards its reduction.

The workshop approach could be used in teaching social studies and religious studies in our primary schools. Children could be put in groups to discuss specific topics and make presentations at the plenary. This approach creates room for experience sharing and active participation by all children.

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Knowledge acquired from these types of classes will make an everlasting impression on the child and will contribute significantly towards making social and religious studies an effective tool for combating corruption in our society.

During such workshop based classes, case studies could be used. A case study like that of War Against Indiscipline (WAI) by the days of Buhari and Idiagbon are good examples which could be used to trigger off discussion on corruption and its attendant evils.

Closely related to the workshop approach is that of peer group discussion. After an introductory explanation by the teacher, the class could be put into their different peer groups and homestead groups for further discussion. This approach carries discussion on the subject matter out of the class as children go home to engage parents and outsiders out of the school peers and age grade in interactive discussions which invariably will bring about cross fertilization of ideas as regards corruption and its effect on the society.

Effective supervision is necessary if the objective is to be achieved. This is not unconnected with the fact that many teachers may not be flexible enough to use the new approach. The approach demands preparation and a lot of patience and understanding during presentation. It equally entails the acquisition of effective communication skills by the teachers who at this point wears a double cap-that of a teacher and that of a facilitator.

### **Suggestions**

The suggested strategy for teaching social studies in our primary schools is predicated on participatory methodology. Because of the creativity and resourcefulness involved, the following suggestions are made;

- 1) Presently, only few people are skilled in using participatory methods for teaching. Arrangements should be made with Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and other bodies with skilled participatory hearing and action personnel to train teachers of social studies and religion. At the end of such training, teachers will, have acquired adequate participatory learning skills to teach social studies and religion in a new light that is capable of achieving better results especially as it affects behaviour change.
- 2) Teachers and other staff of the school should see themselves as role models. They should therefore adhere to the principles of do as I do.
- 3) A joint workshop which is capable of addressing the issue of corruption should be organised at least once in a term for pupils, teachers, leaders and other stakeholders to discuss causes of corruption, their effect and how corruption can be reduced.

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