

SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: PROBLEMS AND THE WAY FORWARD

Inyang, Imoh-Obong Inyang (Mrs.) and Udoh, Linus Akpan (Mr.)

Abstract

This paper takes a look at the state of social studies education in Nigeria, problems and the way forward. It looks at the origin of social studies in Nigeria. The paper also examines the subject matter of social studies, problems encountered in teaching / learning it, specific learning methods. The paper goes on to recommend among other things, that teachers of social studies should make learning materials purposeful, use functional instructional materials, serve as models to students under their care and exhibit content competence by being frontiers of knowledge of the subject matter of social studies.

Introduction

Social Studies is an innovative concept in Nigerian school curriculum. The subject has however come to reawaken the value of the society and is becoming more meaningful and functional, regrettably, it is facing major problems in schools partly because ' many teachers are yet to understand its content and methodology.

Social studies being a process of education emphasizes the relationship human beings have physical and social worlds. Its true nature is seen as the study of man, how he influences and is influenced by other forces, or in short how he solves his problems. According to Obanya (1985), the major areas of social studies are:

- (a) Adaptation - how man fits his way of life to his physical and social environment.
- (b) Co-operation/ Interdependence - how people in a given environment work together,
- (c) Communication - how people satisfy the need to share their thoughts, feelings and ideas with one another.
- (d) Change - how man continuously changes

with his non-static environment.

- (e) Cause and Effect - how every action in man's environment attracts a suitable reaction.
- (f) Needs - how man engages in a variety of activities to satisfy his basic needs.
- (g) Similarities / Differences how man's environment is made up of people, places and phenomena which are similar in some respects and different in others.

The general objectives of social studies in Nigerian schools may therefore, be categorized into:

- (a) Intellectual Education: Training the child in the modes of thinking and inquiry of the social sciences.
- (b) Value Education: Inculcating in the individual some expected societal behaviours and group activities, attitudes, values and feelings.
- (c) Humanistic Education: Helping the child to comprehend life.
- (d) Citizenship Education: Preparing the child for social responsibility.

FRN (1981:8), provides that the national educational aims and objectives to which the philosophy is linked are:

1. The inculcation of national consciousness and national unity.
2. The inculcation of right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the society.
3. The training of the mind in the understanding of the word around, and
- 4 The acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competence both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of his society.

5. These call for a process of making man to learn, think, recall, adapt or adopt, utilize experience, and be flexible. Social studies objectives were developed to solve specific national problems, which include promoting in the young ones the spirit of patriotism and nationalism, exposing them to the problems in the society and equipping them with the necessary skills needed for their survival.

The Origin and the Development of Social Studies in Nigeria

Social studies as a concept has its origin in the United States of America where it was first introduced into the school curriculum for social and civic education. Shortly before the dawn of the 19th century, the effects of a number of educational importance, which later changed the dominant educational theory and teaching methodologies of the time began to be felt.

A major turning point and the historical development of social studies came with the evolution of a new general concept of education described as "education for citizenship and life adjustment". This new aim of education emphasized the use of problems approach in the teaching - learning process as the basic method of achieving its objectives. Through this approach, it was argued that a child will learn practically and directly from his society and group experiences which form the basis of his social studies curriculum.

In 1916, based on the recommendation of the Commission on National Education Association on the Re-organization of Secondary Education, non-historical social studies was added to the school curriculum. This course was made up of social, political, economic aesthetic and cultural aspects of life. It was this time that social studies was officially used, and the subject made its entry into the school curriculum independent of history. Thus, the identity and dignity of social studies education was formally established.

The origin of the teaching of social studies as a traditional single subject dates back

to the early history of education in the country. Although the social studies taught then up till 1960's consisted of the British constitution, the history and geography of the United Kingdom, British Empire and a few other European countries, all these amounting to educating the Nigerian child out of his immediate environments, out of the society and culture.

The resultant effect was that an average Nigerian child knows and could give a detailed account of the past historical events, political systems, civic rights and responsibilities of the people of the United Kingdom while totally lacking comparative ability for the Nigerian situation.

Consequently, this unfortunate situation in the words of Ogunsaya (1984), failed to inculcate in the Nigerian children an awareness of the local environment, national consciousness, pride and desire to know and read about their country.

The credit for social studies in Nigerian educational institutions seems to belong to the University of Nigeria, (UNN), Nsukka, to different groups of people, organizations, and other educational institutions. The UNN established in 1960, was patterned after an American university, and her course structures provided for a general studies programme, Man-in-Society (GS 103) which content emphasized human interaction with the environment. The General Studies programme had long become a basic graduation requirement in all Nigerian universities. This implies that before the Oxford Conference on Social Studies in 1967, Nigeria had already started some relevant social studies innovations.

While some progress was being made at the tertiary level of education in this direction, some committed and dedicated teachers at the secondary school level were also making giant strides towards social studies. For example, in Aiyetoro Comprehensive High School in 1963, some teachers were independently and quietly working on social studies programme for secondary schools.

By 1965, the social studies for Junior-Secondary Classes One and Two received the blessing of the then Western Nigeria Ministry of Education. In 1966, the resulting textbooks on social studies attracted the attention and support of the Ford Foundation of the United States in Curriculum Development in Nigeria, through the Comparative Education Studies and Adaptation Centre (CESAC) of the University of Lagos.

Similarly, between 1964 and 1969, efforts were also made at the Institute of Education of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria with the cooperation of some staff of the University of Wisconsin of U. S. A. to promote Social Studies. After some rigorous Held test by 1970, (CESAC) social studies texts for Forms One to Three, approved for use throughout Nigeria were already widely utilized. Presently, the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), a parastatal of the Federal Ministry of Education has also developed textual materials on social studies curriculum for the Senior Secondary classes (SSI - 3) and had been designed and implemented since 1985. Social Studies is presently an acceptable subject for university admission in Nigeria. In some Nigerian universities, including University of Calabar, University of Uyo, Social Studies is an area of specialization.

From the development so far chronicled, there is therefore, no doubt that the National Curriculum Conference of September 1969 held in Lagos re-echoed the decision of the Mombassa Conference of the previous year. It also emphasized the formal introduction of social studies into the Nigerian educational system. It was the conference of the people because it was dominated mostly by Nigerians. The conference had four far-reaching recommendations relevant to social studies made under Decision Area VIII - Education for living.

These four recommendations as in Fafunwa (1974:241 - 42), found their ways into the First National Policy on Education (1977). The 1969 National Curriculum Conference being the bedrock of the National Policy on Education

1977 and 1978 which emphasizes social studies as a core subject of 6 - 3 - 3 - 4 system of education and the current Universal Basic Education (UBE).

Strategies for Teaching Social Studies

Teaching social studies should take the following pattern:

1. Statement of objectives: The teacher's first task is to state the educational objectives very clearly. He should bear in mind specific objectives of the lesson around which he will weave facts and information, concepts, skills as well as attitudes and values, which students will gain from the unit of instruction.
2. Concepts, attitudes and values to be developed: The teacher is required to spell out how he intends to solve blocks ' of objectives through the unit of work, i.e., the problem area already identified for learning. He will have to identify the basic concepts the students should learn in the unit. For example, in the study of the family, students need to know that members must love themselves, help one another and show respect to each other.
3. Skills and abilities to be acquired: The teacher is required to think up in advance the type of skills that he expects the students to develop or acquire through the lesson unit. Such skills include speaking, writing solving problems and taking appropriate decisions, physical skills through visits and manual involvement.
4. Facts and information to be learnt: This is the content of the unit of work. It involves the information to be taught to students as the score of knowledge required in solving the problem posed by the unit.
5. Materials and Instructional Aids to be used: The teacher should have appropriate textbooks and audio-visual materials so as to properly illustrate, emphasize and portray the new knowledge of facts, skills and attitudes to be acquired.

6. Teaching Techniques: The teacher is expected to state which particular method or combination of methods he would like to use in transmitting facts, knowledge concepts, skills values and attitudes to students.
7. Evaluation of learning outcome: The teacher should think in advance how he can assess the students' progress through questioning and answering sessions, test, observation, quizzes, etc. Evaluation should be a continuous process because the outcome of change in attitude and development of skills is a gradual process.

Resources Required for Teaching Social Studies

Social studies teachers should ensure that resources are available to them. Such resources may be human and material. Some are teacher-made while others are derived from the community. Clark and Starr (1967:327) confirmed that "the best resource the teacher has is the community itself. It is both a source of subject-matter and a source of instructional materials persons.

Resource persons are people found within the locality who have made their mark in their callings and can therefore be used to share ideas with students thereby facilitating teaching and learning. For an example, a successful traditional farmer could be made to enlighten the students on what traditional farming is all about and what makes for a successful farmer. Inyang -Abia (1988:126), looks at resource persons as: Well informed people whom by virtue of their expertise, leadership roles, knowledge, travels, occupations, hobbies, talents or experience in special fields, can speak with unchallenged authority in their fields. They need not be highly learned. Sometimes, they could be intelligent illiterates. Teachers, Musicians, herbalists, businessmen may be capable and willing to share their knowledge and experience through talks, illustrative lectures, demonstrations or tele-lectures.

Other community resources: Apart from resource persons the community can provide botanical gardens, shrines and caves, aquaria, museums, zoos, beaches, festivals, airports, harbours, industries and libraries, prints, non-prints (visual, Audio and Audio-Visual J materials required.

These include textbooks, periodicals, journal, magazines, chalkboards, magnetic boards,, bulletin boards, costumes, real things (realia) graphs, pictures, radios, televisions, films, tape recorders, language laboratories and public address systems. Resources complimen: teachers and learning as they progress through knowledge acquisition. The teacher himself should produce some of these resources.

- 1 Demonstration method: The teacher executes the method while the learners observe and listen.
- 2 Dramatizations: This involves some direct or simple techniques of miming, play let, role-playing, monologue and dialogue and puppetry.
3. The project method: This involves the learners in purposeful and orderly activities.
4. Seminars and symposia: Participants are allowed to ask and answer questions. It creates an opportunity for students to learn how to address an audience.
5. Field trips: Field trips bring the learners in direct contact with learning experiences that transcend volumes of recorded literature.
6. Interviewing: This enables the students to obtain information by interacting with friends and elders and discussing the topics, which are related to their studies.
7. Class discussion: This is a thinking together process or type of cooperation in learning.
8. The Inquiry Method: The inquiry method involves the identification of problems, the collection of data and search for solutions.

Qualities of a Social Studies Teacher

The social studies teachers must:

- (a) Have adequate knowledge of the learner. That is, he acts "in loco parents," i.e. parent substitute.
- (b) Be contented competent: He should be at the frontiers of social studies subject matter. Knowledge of what is to be taught will bring about in the learner the specified learning outcome.
- (c) Have self-confidence.
- (d) Be able to communicate effectively, he must apply the "principle of best fit" which is multi-strategic. This means that the teacher must equip himself with a wide variety of teaching methods and techniques to enable him to function effectively under various conditions. Teachers should themselves possess the virtues they want to include in the student. For teaching to be effective, the teacher must be a mirror of what he teaches. The teacher and the learner must work in an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust. Peck and Havinghurst (1967:200), state that If we wish others to be responsible and effective in their thinking, we should provide them with models of behaviours and give them opportunity, and trust to develop those desirable characteristics.

Problems In Teaching Social Studies

- a) Social studies is relatively new discipline in schools. How to "sell" this discipline has been, and is still a problem.
- b) There is a lack of sufficient quantity of specialist teachers. Teachers in related areas of the social sciences and humanities find themselves teaching in the social studies classrooms. These are auxiliary teachers who are grossly deficient in understanding the body of knowledge relating to social studies and human learning, psychology of children, the measure and evaluation of learning as well as teaching methods.
- c) Poor Educational Financing: This leads to lack of soft and hardware facilities.

- d) Using the lecture method most of the time.
- e) Lack of instructional materials and social studies laboratories.
- e) Too large a class size per teacher.
- g) Low standard of spoken and written English among pupils.
- h) Lack of motivation for teachers, i) General indiscipline in Nigerian schools.

The Way Forward

The successful teaching of social studies depends" on the teachers' understanding of what concepts, values and attitudes are and how to teach them. Teaching of social studies requires among other things, enough time on the timetable and adequate preparation by the teacher. Workshops and seminars on the teaching of the subject ought to be held to regularly produce specialists. The National Development Centre should be established for the teaching of social studies in our primary and post-primary schools, nationwide.

Social studies teachers as experts should do their utmost to create a congenial atmosphere for learning by educating on the need to maintain a healthy psychological climate at home; motivating our students by making learning materials purposeful, satisfying and interesting; using appropriate teaching aids, arranging for remedial work for weak students to avoid dropouts, encouraging students with physical deformities and above all, exhibiting those Values that we want our students to acquire. These are sure ways of making social studies education in Nigeria functional, under the democratic rule this millennium.

Conclusion

Having seen the positive effects of Social Studies education, it is therefore, concluded that Social Studies education is very significant to Nigeria's social, economic and political development.

For effective teaching and learning of Social Studies in schools, teachers of Social Studies should make learning materials

purposeful, use functional instructional materials; serve as models to students under their care and exhibit competence by being frontiers of knowledge of the subject matter.

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**Inyang, Imoh-Obong Inyang (Mrs.) The
Department of Social Studies Akwa Ibom State
College of Education Afaha Nsit Nsit Ibom L.
G. A.**

**Udoh, Linus Akpan (Mr.)
The Department of Social Studies
Akwa Ibom State College of Education
Afaha Nsit
Nsit Ibom L. G. A.**