Social Studies Education in Nigeria: Its Evolution and Development

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Abstract

The introduction of social studies into the curricula of schools in Nigeria has being a major development in the education of the country. Within the short period of this introduction, it is now a core-subject at the primary and junior secondary levels of our education. This paper surveys the history of the development of the subject in Nigeria from the beginning to date, tracing its root from the United States and Britain. The paper concludes by highlighting some of the problems still facing the subject.

Introduction

Education in Nigeria, is now a pragmatic and dynamic one. This is one of the reasons changes continue to take place within its structure from time to time. The society which education is meant to serve is equally a dynamic one. Therefore to be relevant to the needs and aspirations of the society, education must continue to keep pace with changes in the society. This dynamism is reflected in the contemporary Nigerian society where educational policies have been very unstable, keeping in line with the unstable political climate of the country. Education is meant to solve the problems of the society (Audu, 1997); and since new problems keep surfacing in the society from time to time, education too must respond accordingly to keep relevant. It is this issue of relevance in education that leads to the emergence and development of new disciplines and curriculum in the area of education from time to time. The dynamism in education led to the introduction of social studies in the school curriculum as a discipline soon after World War II.

What is Social Studies?

There is no single definition of the subject, social studies, as authors hold different conceptions about it. However, a point on which most social studies educators agree is that, the subject is a study of the society having man as its central theme (Uche, 1980; Okobiah, 1984; Awopetu, 1995).

Okobiah (1984) defines social studies as an inter-disciplinary approach to the study of human beings in group interrelations with both their social and physical environment. To Uche (1980), Social Studies is seen as a field of study in which contents and purposes focus on relationship. Uche also sees social studies as providing knowledge, skills and attitudes that will help people to understand their physical and human environment so as to behave as responsible citizens. Dubey, Onyabe and Prokupek (1980) also conceptualize social studies as a ‘process of education which utilizes the study of human life for the purpose of giving children the opportunity to practice solving problems of crucial importance both for the individual and the society’.

From the above, it is clear that Social Studies deals with the reciprocal relationship existing between man with the tools, to solve the many problems facing him. Social Studies therefore has as one of its goals problem solving.

Social Studies: Its Origin

Iyewarun (1984) citing the report of the National Education Association of 1916 has said that the term Social Studies is American in origin. It started towards the dying decades of the last century. It first started as a result of the committee of Ten of the National Education Association of 1890 that contained suggestions for the teaching of what was called ‘Education for citizenship’. It was also suggested in the report of the committee of seven for the American Historical Association that Social Studies should be developed as a discipline. The report was released in 1916 and it was suggested that a re-organization be...
made in secondary education, especially there was a call for a broadening of the content of the curriculum.

From the United States, Social Studies also spread to Britain. The painful memories of the first world war and the rise of totalitarianism in Europe coupled with the British deteriorating economic condition and her declining importance in world affairs informed the call for an overhauling of the British system of education.

The Association for Education in World Citizenship was formed in 1935 with the aim of advancing the ‘Study of and training in citizenship’ (Lawton and Darfour, 1976: P.4). This started the struggle for a social studies curriculum. In between this period and the 1960, there was a decline in the propagation of social studies. However, it was the Crowther Report of 1959 and the NewSon Report of 1963 that later led to the revival of Social Studies. Crowther’s Report called for the introduction of Social Studies courses to ‘help young workers .... to find their way successfully about the modern world’ (Lawton and Darfour 1976: 10 as cited by Iyewarm 1984).

The publication of lawton Darfour handbook titled the New Social Studies helped to achieve full publicity and support for Social Studies in England.

Social Studies in Nigeria

It was from the United States and Britain that Social Studies spread to Africa (Nigeria inclusive). The adoption of Social Studies as a subject in Africa was to make education more relevant to the needs of the Society (Olaleye, 1992).

Social Studies was introduced into Nigeria like other countries in response to the societal needs and aspirations, (Olaleye, 1992).

And the to use education for national integration as an attempt to heal the wounds of the civil war (Dubey and Barth, 1980).

Around 1958, Social Studies was taught in some Teachers Training Colleges in the defunct Western Region of Nigeria (Awopetu, 1995). At the secondary school level social studies was first taught at Aiyetoro Comprehensive High School in Yewa area of present day Ogun State (Okunrotifa, Mabofa, Roy-Macaulay Oluyemi, Momodu, 1982; Awopetu 1995).

Adejumobi (1978) also confirms that social studies as a field of study was introduced into the Aiyetoro Comprehensive High School in 1964, the programme being mainly financed by the Ford Foundation of America, and it was described as an “Experiment”. With the assistance of the Ford Foundation and the Comparative Education Study and Adaptation Centre (CESAC) of the University of Lagos, the Social Studies department of the school published a book in 1968; which was then adopted for use in the lower forms of the secondary school.

According to Olaleye (1992) the 1967 conference at Queen’s college, Oxford where the ‘needs and priorities of the African countries with regard to curriculum development in social studies’ was considered, led to the 1968 Mombassa Conference in Kenya. This further boosted the development of social studies in Nigeria. It was at the Mombassa Conference that the African Social Studies Programme (ASSP) was fashioned out.

The 1969 National Curriculum Conference held in Lagos was an important watershed in the evolution of Social Studies in Nigeria. The conference recommended the formulation of a new National policy on Education for the country. The policy stimulated the introduction of some new subjects into the school curricula; and social studies was one of them. It was launched in 1982 and has since been adopted all over the country. With the launching of the policy, social studies became one of the core subjects at the primary and junior secondary school levels; and an elective at the Senior Secondary level. Social studies has since consolidated its position on the school curricula and time-table.

The subject is presently taught in virtually in all the Colleges of Education in the country, some universities also award degree in social studies up to the Ph.D. level. It is now a compulsory subject in Technical Colleges.

According to Iyewarum (1984) a notable attempt at promoting Social Studies education in Nigeria was the Northern Nigeria Teacher Education Project, which was sponsored by the Northern Nigerian...
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Another milestone in the development of social studies was the sponsoring of workshops in Zaria and some universities in Nigeria to produce a detailed syllabus for Teacher Education in Nigeria. The syllabus was modified to meet the needs of the Universal Primary Education Programme. This was later used to produce relevant texts published as Universal Primary Education Social Studies Series Book 1 - 5 (NERC, 1977), (Iyewarun 1984).

The Comparative Education Study and Adaptation Centre (CESAC) has also made significant efforts at promoting the teaching of Social Studies. Apart from the publication of relevant texts on Social Studies, it has organised critique workshops for developing social studies curricula for secondary schools in the country.

One of the ways and forces for the promotion of any subject is through the body of subject teachers. “The Social Studies Association of Nigeria” (SOSAN) has been a very strong and formidable pressure group in the promotion of social studies education in Nigeria. The association has organised many seminars, conferences and workshops with the aim of promoting social studies and helping to mobilize the Nigerian citizenry to take active part in civic responsibilities, and to show more patriotism to the course of the country. Among the many seminars it organised was the 1978 conference held at the University of Ilorin, Kwara State. The seminar became a rallying point for scholars from Teacher Training Colleges, secondary schools and officials from Ministries of Information. At the conference many recommendations made by SOSAN and others, which emanated during the conference were synthesized and forwarded to the Government. Some of the recommendations were:

(a) Affording Nigerians the opportunity to take active part in the affairs of their locality and enjoy all social services and privileges provided by the state.

(b) Ensuring the teaching of social studies in schools.

(c) The inclusion of social studies in the curricula of all tertiary institutions under a general studies programme.

Other social studies organisations that have promoting the teaching of the subject in schools include the Social Studies Teachers Association of Nigeria (SOSTAN) and the National Association of Social Studies Educators (NASSE).

Protagonists Of Social Studies In Nigeria.

The social studies teachers at the Aiyetoro Comprehensive High School, Yewa in Egbado of Area of Ogun State from 1963 up to about 1970 played significant roles in the development of the subject an earlier mentioned. According to Makinde (1979) the Social Studies Association was formed in January 1969 at as seminar on social studies held at the Cooperative College, Eleyele Ibadan on January 6 - 15. During that conference, a draft Constitution was adopted for the Association, and the first executive elected. It was headed by Professor Babs Fafunwa, while Mr. M. A. Makinde became the secretary.

The efforts these ‘founding fathers’ of social studies and that of others since have helped to secure an important place for social studies in the school curricula, and as read said earlier it has now taking firm root in Nigerian schools except at the senior secondary level where it is not yet being taught and examined.

Problems of Social Studies in Nigeria

With the success so far in the institutionalisation of social studies in schools, as a relatively new discipline, it is still faced with some ‘teething problems’. Obemeata, Ogugua, Agu and Laosobikan (1982) identified the following problems:

a. The nature and scope of social studies.

b. Lack of relevant instructional materials

c. Shortage of trained manpower.
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a. Lack of enthusiasm by pupils.
a. The unsystematic nature of the scheme of work.
a. The problem of how to teach controversial topics and
a. The limited number of periods allocated to social studies on the school timetable.

Some of the problems highlighted above are already receiving attention by the appropriate authorities. For instance, there are now many colleges of education and universities graduating students of social studies every year. That remains is for the government to employ this category of teachers so as to replace the non-specialists teaching the subject.

Specialists are also writing relevant texts to fill the gap created by the non-availability of relevant texts.

Conclusion:

Social Studies has finally been entrenched in our school curriculum, even enjoying a status not enjoyed by some older subjects. The nature of the subject coupled with the experience of Nigeria during the post independence period which is similar to that of the Western Countries has endeared it to its propagators and won for it a place in the curricula of schools. Perhaps the only major obstacles remaining is the non-inclusion of social studies at the senior secondary level. It is hoped that the Social Studies Association of Nigeria (SOSAN) and those charged with the responsibility of implementing the curriculum would ensure that the subject is taught at this level soonest, even if only as an elective.

References: