

CROSS-NATIONAL ANALYSES OF SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM IN EDUCATION

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Abstract

The historical development of social studies in the United States of America, Britain and Nigeria was briefly explored and some core elements specified. The provision of citizenship education to learners using the integrated social studies curriculum was examined. The 'status' problems of social studies curriculum in the three nations were analyzed along with particular problems of attempting to relate them to content and methodology. The analyses were not only intended to merely highlight the weakness of social curriculum globally but to show that there are certain aspects of Social Studies curriculum that are essential to effective curriculum planning, development and implementation. Implications of the analytical study for Social Studies educators were discussed.

Introduction

Initial developments in social studies education in the United States can be traced to the 1916 report of the Social Studies committee of the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education entitled, *The Social Studies in secondary Education*. With the report, Social Studies achieved legitimate status as a subject in schools. It was from such a beginning that Social Studies became a required course in primary and secondary schools in the United States. Its role has been expanded in education throughout many parts of the world.

The concept of Social Studies fits well with the ideas and practices of progressive education. The subject has been highly publicized in the last century in many teacher institutes as leaders once again attempted to move Social Studies instruction from the mere imparting of subject matter to programmes aimed at leading learners to find excitement through exploration, inquiry, and discovery. They are also concerned with using timely content that society perceives as being relevant; but the major emphasis is on helping learners develop the competencies and attitudes essential for citizens in a democratic society - citizens who will wish and be able to maintain and extend the fundamental values of society. In spite of this, however, today many teachers still continue to overlook the prime potential of Social Studies in enabling learners to learn how to live in society.

There was little evidence of the existence of Social Studies in the curriculum of British schools at the beginning of the twentieth century. It was after the second world war that a move towards the introduction of Social Studies in the curriculum of the schools in Britain was made. It was considered desirable to design a curriculum that would highlight the 'decency of democracy'. The call for Social Studies curriculum was made even more urgent by the establishment of secondary education for all in 1944 and raising of the school leaving age, at that time from fourteen to fifteen. In 1949, definite and more determined steps were taken toward establishing Social Studies as a school subject in Britain. When Hemming (1949) published his work on *Teaching the Social Studies in Secondary Schools*, he strongly argued for a broadly based Social Studies curriculum with emphasis on activity methods. Hemming's view was greatly supported by the publication of the Ministry of Education Pamphlet Number 16 of 1949 which was devoted explicitly to the question of education for citizenship (Lawton and Barry, 1976). The success of Social Studies in Britain was however, largely influenced by its success and impact in the United States.

The African Social Studies Programme (ASSP) began in 1968 as the first truly international Social Studies organization. The fifteen member nation include Botswana, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Nigeria, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. These nations have been working together to reform education in Africa by using Social Studies to sensitize their citizens on the needs and resources of the African Continent. UNESCO has also actively promoted social studies through sponsorship of conferences and, recently, the publication of a *Handbook on the Teaching of Social Studies* (Kissock, 1981).

In Nigeria, Social Studies as a defined area of study did not develop with the establishment of

schools in the country. Social Studies education was patronized through Religious Education, and lessons in History, Geography and Civics. The modern history of Social Studies in Nigeria has its roots in the ripples of curriculum innovation which began in Europe in the early 1930's. It was an extension of this general awakening in curriculum reforms that led to the introduction of Social Studies at an Advanced Teacher Training College of the former West Region (Ohio project) in the late 1950's Aina, Adeyoyin, Obilo and Ahmadu, 1982), In the 1960's conferences and projects began to be organized in the effort to forge an educational programme that would incorporate Social Studies. The Aiyetoro Comprehensive High School Social Studies project became an example. The great concern shown by the Federal Ministry of Education resulted in the establishment of parastatals such as the Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council. (NERDC) and the Comparative Education Study and Adaptation Centre (CESAC) which in turn were responsible for triggering off programmes for the development and actualization of Social Studies as a definite subject in the school curriculum.

The Integrated Social Studies Curriculum

In the United States, the term "social studies" originally tended to encompass topical studies related to understanding and living in society that were not parts of the usual history, geography, or political economy offerings (Gross Messick, Chapin, and Sutherland, 1978). Gradually, the importance of the emerging field curriculum came to be understood by many educators. Academics also came to recognize the potential of centering multidisciplinary courses, units and lessons in Social issues that cut across subject-matter boundaries and therefore enabled the teacher to draw on several relevant disciplines. Textbooks and course guides began to reflect these ideas and the Integrated Social Studies was on its way. Similarly, in Britain, Cannon (1964) disclosed that though the preparation for life through the conventional subjects still had its advocates, there was an increasing expression of opinion that the content of traditional subjects be selected with a greater eye to its relevance and that subject-barriers should be broken down to produce a new synthesis. The culmination of the synthesis approach to citizenship education in Britain was to be found in Social Studies movement of the immediate post-war years. It was reflected in official publications, textbooks for teachers and articles in journals. But perhaps, the most extreme exposition of synthetic approach to social studies was to be found in Hemming's work. His social studies combined the material from history, geography and civics together with relevant materials from other subject fields, into a single integrated background course.

In Nigeria, Olawepo (1984) observed that all subjects in the school can be used to develop social awareness and responsibility by inculcating whatever social content is appropriate to them. But the effect would be "patchy and scrappy" unless all the partial contributions of the single subjects are unified within a course.

It was not until 1967 that the idea of introducing Integrated Social Studies into primary school curriculum in Africa was proposed at a conference in London. This idea became mature during the African Social Studies Conference held in Kenya in 1968. The conference resolved that a new approach was required which would demand the eventual integration of the traditional subjects - Civics, Geography and History - to which must be added elements of anthropology, economics, and sociology and which would also involve manual and physical activities. It was in the spirit of the African Social Studies Programme that the Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council organized Social Studies seminar in 1978 at Jos and recommended the integrated approach to Social Studies education. This was done on the assumption that integrated approach stresses the interrelationship of man and his physical environment, economic, political and other socio-cultural institutions within the context of his society.

The adoption of integrated approach to citizenship education by the United States. Britain and African countries throws more light on the concept of social studies. Whatever may be regarded as the concept of Social Studies, the phrase "integrated study" should always be given prominence to it.

Social Studies Teaching In Schools

Social Studies has been seen to be integrated both in content and methodology. The introduction of new approaches to learning the subject needed a change in the education of teachers. Literature review on the background of teachers teaching the new Social Studies at any school level in the United States, Britain and Nigeria shows that majority of them had history or geography background. No wonder therefore in the U.S.A. thousands of institutes and workshops were organized to orientate teachers to the accepted teaching approach to Social Studies. Schneider (1980) observed that Social Studies is still mostly History, Government and particularly at the elementary level. Geography with only slight attention to current social problems. Similarly, instruction using traditional lecture and discussion strategies with emphasis on acquisition of information is most typical of contemporary Social Studies classroom. The reasons for the lack of fundamental change in Social Studies education in the United States are attributed to the American decentralized system of public education and heavy dependence on instructional materials that are traditional in form and content.

In Britain, the concern of the practicing teachers over these new approaches was reflected in articles on their difficulties and experiences in teaching social studies and in books about the work of specific secondary schools. The reports of several overseas teachers who went to Britain to observe the teaching of Social Studies were unanimous that there was a general air of disillusion and discontinuation of such teaching (Cannon, 1964). One of such reports reflected the opinion of thirty Education Officers that Social Studies was losing ground and that many teachers were reported to have returned to the more traditional approach after only a brief experiment.

In Nigeria, after the curriculum, the next important phase was the methodology of the subject upon which lies the achievement of the objectives of the curriculum. It was readily observed that "children cannot benefit from the integrated nature of the syllabus as one teacher cannot possibly answer all the questions relating to other disciplines (Udo, 1974). In an attempt to find solution to effective implementation of the integrated approach to Social Studies teaching, Udo (1974) suggested what he called "block-of-time" schedule which makes it possible for many classes to be combined and all the teachers forming a team in teaching. He also claimed that the "open classroom" system helps the students to consult teachers freely and of their own choice whereby the team teaching technique is easily applied. But the policy of team teaching has plagued many school with the teachers of different social science subjects claiming the right or avoiding it because they feel the syllabus is more related to one subject or the other.

It may be concluded, from available literature, that the teaching of Social Studies in many countries is faced with the problem of qualified teachers and relevant instructional materials. Also majority of the Social Studies teachers are likely to be a conventionally trained historian or geographer and very rarely a sociologist or social anthropologist. While efforts are being made to produce truly qualified teachers and relevant instructional materials for the subject the advice of Cannon (1964) should be borne in mind that the chief requirement for a successful implementation of Social Studies is a fervent belief and interest in life and man and in youth as the growing point of civilization.

Status Of Crisis Of Social Studies

A research study conducted in 1973 in some secondary schools in the United States showed that Social Studies curricula were in a state of curriculum anarchy (Schneider, 1980). Joyce and Alleman-Brooks (1980) noted that the status of Social Studies in the United States public schools was declining. The back to the "basics" movement elevated reading, writing and mathematics to a position of prominence. The movement had its counterpart in Social Studies. Increasingly, elementary and middle school programmes in this field reflected a return to such perennial "basics" as History and Geography and attendant decline in civics and varied forms of Integrated Social Studies curricula. The difficulty of assessing social studies achievement by paper-and-pencil tests was regarded by some educators as a valid reason for de-emphasizing social studies instruction. Another criticism against the subject is that it relies too heavily on abstractions and the past and avoids what should be as opposed to what is.

Joyce and Alleman-Brooks (1980) observed that though there is a less obvious explanation for the decline of Social Studies in the United States, Social Studies educators are largely responsible is their reluctance to reach even nominal agreement regarding the identity of this school subject. That educators have grappled with this identity problem is a matter of record for equally apparent is their inability to agree upon an acceptable definition of social studies. This is evidenced by the wordings of position statements enunciated by professional organizations, by state departments of education and by local school districts. According to Joyce and Alleman-Brooks (1980) these statements convey the impression that since this school subject strives to be everything to everyone, it is devoid of a clearly defined rationale. Clearly, observed from the literature, Social Studies is fighting for survival in the American elementary and middle schools.

In Britain, it was observed that Social Studies failed to maintain its status among other subjects in the school system. There were reasons for the failure of the new course to become an established part of the curriculum. Most probably were the social and economic pressures which led to an increasing concern for standards and in particular to their expression in examination qualifications. Further reasons according to Cannon (1964) lay in the amorphous nature of Social Studies itself. While Cannon (1964) noted that Social Studies was all things to all men, Joyce and Alleman-Brooks saw this as a weakness.

Further reason was the leverage of criticism of Social Studies contained in the writings of historians and geographers of the post-war Britain who saw the subjects as a threat to the integrity and status of their own subjects. One can therefore fall in line with one writer in 1950 as Cannon (1964) cites from Stewart that “perhaps social studies has raised its voice too loudly before it was confident that it knows what to say”. Moreover, the failure of Social Studies in Britain may be due to what Cannon (1964:23)described as:

The vagueness of its content and its crossing of traditional barriers, combined with the increasingly rigid examination structure, the new experiments were mostly confined to the younger and less academic pupils;
— a subject thus identified with the “non - academic” child has little chance of success in English education system.

The above citation shows how the nature, scope and concept of Social Studies worked against the status of the subject.

In Nigeria, the seminar organized by the Nigeria Educational and Development Council at the Teacher Resource Centre, Jos in 1978 identified the following issues as confronting Social Studies Education in Nigeria.

- (i) Problem of concept and meaning of Social Studies.
- (ii) Problem of content selection.
- (iii) Problem of teaching technique and instructional materials.
- (iv) Problem of teacher training and retraining.
- (v) Problem of quality control and evaluation ,and
- (vi) The implication of social disciplines as History, Geography, Economics and Government.

The above problems seem to combine together to challenge the status of Social Studies among the subjects in the Nigerian schools curricula. Subject specialists, notably historians and geographers are discontented with the increasing importance and spread of Social Studies. They consider History and Geography as integrated subjects in themselves and therefore highly critical of the claim of social studies to represent a special synthesis. They criticize Social Studies as being ill-defined, superficial, water-down and lacking in depth. They seem to regard it as a clog in the educational wheel preventing early specialization and excellence in History, Geography and Government at GCE Ordinary and Advanced Levels.

Teachers who had had a previous training in the closely allied subjects like History, Geography and other social science disciplines should be the best source for teaching Social Studies since the new subject draws freely from the concepts, skills and methods of these subjects. But research shows that these teachers rather than join in the effort to establish Social Studies, covertly

oppose the integrated concept. Their egos have already been anchored in their subject areas (DuBey, 1981).

Implications For Social Studies Educators

The problems in the effective teaching of Social Studies directly point to the teachers' attitude to the subject. Its core position among the subjects in the junior secondary schools cannot resolve the identity crises of Social Studies in Nigeria especially as the subject is not offered at the GCE/SSCE level. Policy alone cannot establish the identity of a discipline. Like the implementation of any development project, curriculum implementation in Social Studies can best be achieved through a holistic approach. This means that the few knowledgeable specialists in the subject areas must be doing everything at once. It requires programme development, constant evaluation of the curriculum, in-service programme, writing course materials and textbooks, organizing conferences and workshops, delivering papers and helping to disseminate information about the subject.

As observed by DuBey (1982), without effective teaching, the new Integrated Social Studies can hardly succeed since the role of teachers is vital to any successful curriculum innovation. The report of the Mombassa Conference (1968) highlights the need for training and retraining of teachers who are supposed to teach social studies in schools. Dowouna (1968) observed that most teachers would have been trained to teach in the traditional ways. Many may be confused by the suggestion that a completely new approach is desirable. The conference having recommended the integrated approach to Social Studies in content and methodology noted that its introduction will require good teachers with sound and wide background and specially trained to implement it.

Although team teaching as suggested by Udo (1974) seems a possible solution to the shortage of qualified social studies teachers, it should not be allowed to continue indefinitely otherwise it will make Social Studies a mere term used in relation to the area of the curriculum covered separately by humanities and social sciences. As in most disciplines, the teaching of Social Studies depends largely on the knowledge and personality of the teacher. The inductive or discovery method is no doubt the best for Social Studies; to achieve good results from this technique however, the teacher has to be effective by preparing his lessons well (Udo, 1974). Okon (1998) noted that effective teachers are skillful in guiding the learning, they are intelligent and have a broad background of understanding with respect both to the subject matter they teach and to cultural materials of learning. It is therefore necessary to put in place regular seminars, workshops and conferences for teachers to help them improve and update their knowledge and instructional strategies.

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