CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE ON SOCIAL STUDIES
EDUCATION CURRICULUM IN NIGERIA: PROBLEMS
AND PROSPECTS

By

CATHERINE UBONG AKPAN
Department of Social Studies,
College of Education,
Afaha Nsit,
Akwa Ibom State.

Abstract
Social studies is a core-subject offered in Junior Secondary School educational system in Nigeria. This paper therefore examines various contending issues in social studies education curriculum. The definitions of relevant terms such as, Social studies education curriculum and social studies were given. Historical perspective of social studies education, objectives of social studies curriculum and implementation issues as it affects social studies curriculum in Nigeria were discussed. The problems and prospects of social studies were enumerated. However, recommendations were made in line with the belief of the paper.

One of the critical perspectives on social studies education curriculum in Nigeria is curriculum implementation.

There is the need to overhaul the implementation issues in social studies curriculum in Nigeria with a view to improve upon its execution in order to achieve the desired goals as demanded by the National Policy on Education. The National Policy on Education (2004) viewed education in Nigeria of which social studies curriculum is core as an instrument par excellence for effecting national values and total development. According to Adralegbe (1980), in Umar (2007), social studies education curriculum is a problem – approach discipline through which man learns about problems of survival in his environment. It is seen as a veritable tool for inculcating appropriate values, attitudes, skills and knowledge in citizens so that they can be
functional and responsible. Okam (2002), regarded social studies as a curriculum instrument for inculcating citizenship norms-building. Many empirical studies reveal that we are yet to attain this goal. In other words the Nigerian populace, through their school systems, is yet to effectively achieve the desired ends that promoted the introduction and teaching of social studies in the country. The lapses are not entirely inherent in policy formulation as in National Policy on Education but on the implementation issues as will be considered in this paper.

The Concept of Social Studies Curriculum

According to Akinlaye, Ayodele, Blarin and Olaniyonu (1997), social studies curriculum is concerned with what is planned, programme selected, provided and guided by the culture, experiences and knowledge of the society for the individual learners in the nation’s schools. It should be noted that the needs, values, aspirations, traditions, norms, wants, desires, demands and cultures are different among the different types of people all over the world. Social studies curriculum provides an essential link between (a) Society’s aspirations and accomplishment, (b) Educational thought and practice and (c) Teachers and child curiosity. Akinlaye et al (1997) viewed social studies curriculum as an educational programme which embraces knowledge, methods, resources, evaluation and societal experiences offered to the learners, in an effort to promote effective democratic values and skills for effective citizenship.

The Concept of Social Studies

Ethman (1974) in Danladi (2005), defined social studies as that parts of the school general education programme which is concerned with the preparation of the citizens for participation in a democratic society. Danladi (2005), defined social studies education as a field of study of man and his activities in relation to his social, economic, political, cultural and physical environments in order to achieve understandings, skills, attitudes and values that are necessary for personal and societal development.

Goals and Objectives of Social Studies Curriculum

The National Curriculum Conference according to Azide (2007) identified the following as the National aims and objectives of Nigeria Education:

i. Including of national consciousness and national unity.

ii. Inculcation of right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and Nigerian society.

iii. The training of the mind in the understanding of the world around.

iv. Acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competencies both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of his society.
The goals and objectives of Social Studies are not the same all over the world because social studies is society-based. The objectives of social studies education in Nigeria are reminiscent of Bloom’s taxonomy of educational objectives that emphasize the cognitive, affective and psycho motor domains. However, based on national aims and objectives of education in Nigeria as outlined by Uche (1980) in Azide (2007), there are four genera objectives of social studies curriculum which include:

i. **Citizenship Education**: To develop a positive attitude to citizenship and the desire to make a positive personal contribution towards the realization of one.

ii. **Humanistic Education**: To show interest in working for the welfare of others and the entire society.

iii. **Intellectual Education**: To ensure the acquisition of relevant body of knowledge and information this is an essential prerequisite for personal development and for contribution towards the betterment of the society at large.

iv. **Values Education**: To develop the ability to learn to acquire basic skills essential for making sound judgments.

Adeyoyin (1993) in Umar (2007), agreed that social studies in Nigeria is primarily concerned with the development for good citizens. Social studies curriculum strives to deviate from the slavish and uncritical recitation of Western concepts and prejudices about developing societies by disseminating information based on the peculiarities and differences of our people. The vision of social studies according to Danladi (2005), is directed at developing personal, moral and environmental discipline. Social studies curriculum makes effort to develop a consciousness in the citizenry at all levels of the society which will inculcate in them the virtues of self-regulation, rediscovery of the meaning of duty and accept responsibility. Pursue honest endeavours through dedication and hard work.

The overall goal of social studies education is the inculcation of the values, habits and orientation which will lead without force to the realization of a great, self-reliant society in which justice, democratic change, responsibility and tolerance shall prevail. Social studies curriculum is viewed as a dynamic instrument for the social, economic, political, physical and cultural development of the citizens.

In a nutshell, social studies curriculum is an instrument par excellence for effecting the desired overall development in Nigeria.
Historical Perspectives of Social Education

Social studies curriculum as a school subject had it’s origin in the United States of America in 1916. According to Kissock (1981) in Umar (2007) the high degree of success that Americans registered in using social studies as a tool for nation building has so impresses African mind that many African countries including Nigeria adopted this subject area in their various classroom settings as a curriculum design for national development since the 1960s. It was in Ayetoro Comprehensive High School that social studies as an integrated subject was first introduced to secondary school subjects in Nigeria in 1963. In 1969, social studies department was established in the Ahmadu Bello University. The introduction of social studies was disturbed in the former Eastern region due to Nigeria civil war. According to Enem (2000), the 1969 National Curriculum Conference and the National Curriculum Workshop of 1971 launched social studies to the nation’s primary schools. The primary, secondary and teachers’ college curriculum for social studies was developed in 1973. The National Policy on Education registered social studies as one of the useful subjects in primary and post primary schools by 1977. In 1980s, many Universities and Colleges of Education offered courses in social studies. many textbooks had been developed on social studies in 1980s. Presently, social studies is a core subject in the newly introduced 9-years Basic Education Programme of Universities Basic Education in Nigeria. The success of the subject could be attributed to the efforts of various professional bodies who worked relentlessly to propagate the subject among which are the Nigerian Education Research Council now known as Nigerian Education Research and Development Council (NERDC), Comparative Education study and adaptation centre (CESAC), Social Studies Association of Nigeria (SOSAN), Northern Nigeria Teacher Education Project (NNTEP) and National Teacher’s Institute (NTI).

Critical Perspective on Social Studies Education in Nigeria: Implementation Issues

It has been found over the years that social studies curriculum has not really been an effective engine for achieving its stated objectives hence, the need to overhaul the implementation issues. These issues would be discussed as follows:

i. Qualities and Quantities of Social Studies Teachers

Okam (2002) stated that the social studies teacher represents a major source of success in the process of utilizing the curriculum content of his/her subject as an instrument for effective inculcation of citizenship norms and virtues among students in Nigerian schools. He observed that if the social studies curriculum is to contribute its own quota in generating positive orientations among students for the purpose of achieving an enhanced human and social development. It must capitalize on the assets of the teachers’ factor in bringing about this. He affirmed that wherever social studies is taught, the classroom teacher is the primary determinant of what the students learn. The
single most important factor in any teaching-learning episode as revealed by Ukeje (1996) is that:

*Teachers are the hub of any educational system. For upon their number, their devotion and their effectiveness depend the success of the system and no education system can be stronger than the quality of its teachers.*

It is the expertise of the professional social studies teachers in the classroom pedagogy that will contribute to the achievement of the state objectives of social studies, the various categories of teachers involved in the implementation of social studies curriculum in schools have brought about different groups in which teachers are labeled by various social studies curricularists.

Baar, Barth and Sharms (nd) in Danladi (2005) came up with three categorical groupings for these definitions known as the three traditions of social studies. They are:

a) **Social Studies Taught as Citizenship Transmission**
The purpose of teaching social studies is to develop good citizens through the inculcation of desirable values of the society such as honesty, loyalty, obedience, discipline and democratic culture. The primary interest of the citizenship transmission tradition is how social norms and values are transmitted within the context of the school.

b) **Social Studies Taught as Social Studies**
This tradition is based on the fact that social studies is greatly influenced by the social sciences. It is subdivided into two: multi-disciplinary approach, the teacher lefts the contents from different socials science disciplines and teaches them as social science. The contents and concepts in different social sciences maintain their identity and integrity. In integrated approach, the contents and concepts are chosen from different disciplines but their identities are of no particular consequence.

c) **Social Studies Taught as Reflective Inquiry**
In this approach, the purpose of teaching social studies is to produce citizens who can identify problems, analyze the problems and take objective decisions. They agree that three are problems in the society which are mostly social in nature and these problems can be solved by society by social studies using scientific procedures.

The differences in traditions are crucial issues in social studies curriculum implementation. In a general sense, there are two basic qualities expected of a
professional social studies teacher irrespective of the tradition he/she belong to. They are:

1. **Professional Qualities:** Any one that will handle social studies at any level of education in Nigeria should be professionally trained in the area of mastery of the epistemology and ontology of social studies. He/she should be acquainted with the aims and objectives that prompted the introduction and teaching of social studies curriculum in Nigeria. The social studies teacher should master inquiry methods rather than expository methods in classroom dispensation. He/she should appreciate the rationale behind the employment commitment to the availability and use of resource materials in order to help learners achieve the objectives of social studies curriculum. It is also expedient for him/her to master the varieties of requisite evaluation processes and procedures in ascertaining students’ attainment of social studies objectives at all levels and domains of learning such as cognitive, affective and psycho-motor.

2. **Citizenship Qualities:** Professional social studies teachers must be good citizens themselves before they can make good citizens out of students. Jarolimek (1977) in Udontia (2008) in relation to change in behavior expressed the view that attitudes are caught and not taught and that children emulate and develop the attitude of significant others such as teachers, peers, elders, religious leaders, parents, close relations and others with whom they associate. The social studies teachers should acquire desirable norms, values, skills attitudes, democratic ethos and knowledge so that he/she will be able to help the students to achieve same.

The curriculum and pedagogical issues associated with the foregoing considerations according to Okobiah (2004), revealed that social studies teachers lack sufficient awareness about the epistemology and ontology of social studies.

2 **Funding of Social Studies Education Curriculum**

The issue of funding of education in Nigeria is vital since education is an important tool to effect national development and progress. Funding of education will affect the implementation of socials studies curriculum since it is a subset of the nation’s education.
Table 1: Annual Budgetary Allocation to Education in Nigeria (1998-2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Budgetary Allocation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>10.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>11.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>08.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>07.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>05.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>01.83%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Danladi (2003:2002) UNESCO recommendation to the funding of Education is 26% of Annual budget.

Over the years, funding of education generally has been poor and this ugly trend has its toll on the implementation of social studies curriculum. The ideal function of social studies teacher is to pursue truth and the liberation of the mind for social, economics and political freedom, understanding and progress. The social studies teachers are to engage in community activities that will impact directly on the lives of students and citizens. These activities are expected to create and transmit fundamental knowledge, attitudes, values and political skills for personal and social development.

3 Social Studies Curriculum, Information Technology and Globalization

The issue facing social studies teachers are enormous in a country bedeviled with social ills. According to Danladi (2006), Information Technology (IT) offers a variety of micro electric based devices that can assist social studies teachers reach out to the target population in order to design social studies curriculum in such a way as to be a panacea to social problems. The social studies teachers must train and alter himself/herself on the use of IT in order to be able to modify, change and alter undesirable attitudes that are constraints to the overall development of Nigeria as a Nation.

4 The Quality and Quantity of New Entrants

According to Danladi (2005), British society generally view the course content of social studies as not sufficiently rigorous for the bright and able students, and that
it is meant for the less able, it was regarded as low status activities. Many people hold this erroneous view in Nigeria that social studies curriculum is designed for those that are not very brilliant. Little wonder why social studies as a course is suggested for those that were not very good academically and were not given admission in other courses especially in higher institutions.

5 Multi-Ethnic Social Studies Curriculum

The population of Nigeria is given as about 140 millions. Nigeria as an entity is made up of people of divers’ ethnic groups, cultures, religious beliefs, political affiliations, democratic cultures and developmental divides. These are conscientious issues that are bound to affect the implementation of social studies curriculum.

Problems of Implementation of Social Studies Curriculum

There are the general obstacles against the implementation of social studies curriculum in Nigeria. Problem of definitions: Social studies as a subject, has no universally accepted definition since its inception in America in 1916. Teacher Education: Inadequate social studies teachers at all levels of the personal pronouns are not use education system. The preparation of social studies teachers is also sub-standard:

i. Content Selection: Barr, Barth Sharms in Danladi came up with three traditions in social studies. These are social studies as (a) citizenship education (b) Social science (c) Reflective inquiry. Teachers tend to select their teaching contents based on their own traditions then problem arises.

ii. Problem of Method: Most social studies teachers are still friendly with traditional/expository methods at the expense of experimental/inquiry methods which could have helped in achieving the objectives of social studies as demanded in the National Policy on Education.

iii. Inadequacy of suitable social studies textbooks written by the experts in the field.

iv. Teaching aids were grossly inadequate in Nigerian schools and the available ones are not used by the teachers.

v. Degrading Societal Value: The value system is gradually breaking down in our society. Most people value money more than hard work and this is contrary to ideals of social studies.
Prospects of Social Studies Education

If the implementation issues in social studies curriculum are resolved adequately, the subject has the ability to develop in Nigerians positive values, attitudes, skills and knowledge necessary for the survival of citizens and the society in general. It is hoped that social studies education will inculcate in the citizens high moral standard, social understanding, togetherness, love, respect, tolerance, positive national values, dignity of labour, national consciousness and national unity. Okobiah (2004) agreed that social studies curriculum is designed to inculcate in the masses desirable social habits and attitude as well as acquire useful manipulative skills of solving the emerging problems in the society. The prospect of social studies curriculum is predicated upon its capability of presenting partial or even total solutions to multidimensional trafficking, corruption, money laundering, religious and ethnic confrontation, HIV/AIDS scourge, terrorism, poverty and hunger.

Conclusion

The paper has discussed the implementation issues as its affects social studies curriculum, time has come when lip-service should no more be paid to the implementation issues of social studies curriculum in Nigeria both in the areas of quality and quantity of teachers funding, Information Technology demands, qualities and quantities of students entrants and the issue of multi-ethnic realities. It should be noted that these issues can be easily addressed through social studies curriculum content for building a virile and democratic culture for the progress of the nation and for the well being of all citizens.

Recommendations

In the light of implementing social studies curriculum for the benefits of all citizens and Nigeria as a whole, the following recommendations are made:
1) Teaching of social studies in our schools colleges and universities should be exclusively reserved for graduates of social studies education who have a track of record.
2) There should be adequate funding of education in general and social studies curriculum in particular in the area of provision of workshops, internet service, libraries, teaching aids and adequate textbooks.
3) Social studies teacher should be computer literate in order to cope with the challenges of Information Technology and Globalization.
4) Only those that meet up with the national commission on Colleges of Education and National University Commission guidelines should always be given admission to study social studies in Nigerian schools.
5) All Nigerians should have value re-orientation and think of Nigeria and the national values above all other considerations.
References


