

## RE-EXAMINING SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES CONFRONTING THE ALL-ROUND DEVELOPMENT OF 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY LEARNERS

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### **Abstract**

*The aim of education in Nigeria is the training of the individual to contribute to the growth and development of his/her nation or wherever he/she finds himself/herself and for the transmission of the social and cultural values to new generations. However, the Nigerian society has been encircled by political, economic, social catastrophes amongst others. Consequently, Social Studies is consigned the responsibility to develop in Nigerian citizens an understanding of their societal values, knowledge and skills that would enable them to deal with and proffer solutions to the problems of the world in which they live, and learn how to live cordially in the society with their neighbors. On the contrary, the achievement of the objectives of Social Studies Education in Nigerian Schools appears to be bedridden due to moral decadence and perilous societal vices. This study was therefore designed to re-examine Social Studies Curriculum in Nigerian schools with a view to determine its success or failure. Also, the study explores the objectives, roles and prospects of Social Studies Education for an all-round development of contemporary learners; and the issues and challenges combating their all-round development. Hence, it was recommended among others that Social Studies Curriculum should be made to address emergent issues challenging the nation. The issues that are hostile to national development to be addressed include terrorism, child trafficking, child abuse, armed robbery, hostage taking and suicide bombing, amongst others.*

**Keywords:** Social Studies, Education, Curriculum, Issues, Challenges, 21<sup>st</sup> Century

### **Introduction**

**T**he motive for adopting any innovative educational programme is change. Consequently, the national philosophy of education in Nigeria recognizes the need for Social Studies Education in fostering the desired social orientation needed after independence in mobilizing the citizens for staunch growth and national development. The subject was adopted in Nigeria about 50 years ago as a result of the quest for relevance in the Nigerian education. The traditional subjects like Geography, History and Civics inherited from the colonial education system according to Mbaba and Omabe (2012) were condemned for not being pertinent both in purpose and content to the immediate needs of the Nigerian child and the society at large. The traditional subjects

also encouraged learners to be conversant with the colonial master's countries than about their own environment and problems in their societies (Ikem & Reuben 2012).

Social Studies in several nations of the world are essentially introduced to meet certain specific needs and aspirations of the people. In Britain for instance, Social Studies was introduced into the school curriculum after the first and second world wars as cure for social problems (Edinyang & Ubi 2013). The Nigerian society is not an exception to this. This however, partly explains why Social Studies has been given reverence at all levels of Nigerian education system. The corruption free, civilized, peaceful and integrated society which Nigeria is yearning for cannot be achieved without a firm foundation as well as successful implementation

of Social Studies curricula at all educational level. Social Studies as a discipline is saddled with the responsibility of transmitting and instilling positive values into the citizens of this nation. In the opinion of Alberta (2000), Social Studies has been accepted as a school subject that should help students to attain the basic knowledge, skills and positive attitudes needed to be responsible citizens and contributing members of society. National development remains a challenge that beset all nations of the world that aspire for greatness. Social Studies Education encompasses all aspects of societal development; be it political, economic, social, cultural, technological or educational.

In Nigerian context, the goals of Social Studies curriculum design is aimed at building a sound and balanced mind as a basis for functional social education directed towards the development of intelligent, responsible and self-reliant citizen. Integrating and dispensing social knowledge through successful implementation of Social Studies curricula in Nigerian schools is directed towards the following objectives: self-confidence and initiatives; power of imagination and resourcefulness; desire for knowledge and continued learning; sense of compassion for the less fortunate; sense of respect for and tolerance of the opinion of others; social values and attitudes such as: cooperation; participation; interdependence; honesty; integrity; trustworthiness; diligence and obedience; and a spirit of national consciousness and patriotism (Garb, Singh, Yusuf & Saad, 2012). These are considered necessary for sound and functional Social Studies education.

### **Social Studies Curriculum and the All-round Development of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learners**

In order to achieve the aforementioned basic goals, the subject has passed through series of curriculum reviews and reforms over the years (Falade & Adeyemi, 2011). These reforms were considered in order to actualize the aims and objectives of the subject but recent reforms, most especially at the Universal Basic Education of Nigeria (UBE) (Orji, 2012;

Falade, 2016) has been made to promote the all-round development of 21<sup>st</sup> Century learners via:

- 1) providing insights into the use of various knowledge structure and procedure from the social sciences that has relevance in modern civilizations;
- 2) fostering students better understanding of the movements, events and personalities that have influence the history of their immediate environment and the wider world as a global community; and
- 3) promoting and improve human relations through a better understanding of others within the immediate environment and beyond (Edinyang & Ipuole, 2014:145).

In order to achieve the abovementioned, the basis of contents in Social Studies curriculum design is drawn primarily from the social sciences, humanities and natural science (National Council for the Social Studies, NCSS 1992; 2004) although, with an orientation that differs from the individual subject disciplines of the social sciences, humanities and natural science. The role of Social Studies in pioneering sustainable national development is essential primordial and valued when Obama (2009) cited in Edinyang and Ipuole (2014) affirms that we need the insights and critical thinking skills obtained in Social Studies to combat poverty, crime, discrimination, and to make our nation just and free. However, to Obama (2009) cited in Edinyang and Ipuole, (2014), there have been critical efforts in the pursuit of national development but whenever this adoption is ushered by lack of adequate preparation and zeal by people who must make the new programme active, the chances of achieving the assistance of the programme would not only be greatly diminished, but the survival of the programme itself will in due course be at stake. Lamentably, Mezeobi, Fubara and Mezieobi (2013) eloquently state that Social Studies is failing because it has not achieved its objectives in Nigeria when he states that, Social Studies education in Nigerian schools has failed in its educational mission in Nigeria or rather is falling in this enterprise. This is in consonance

with the opinion of Osakwe (2012) who had earlier stress that Nigerian Social Studies should begin to focus on reformation and reorganization of ideas and perceptions to make the subject more relevant to 21<sup>st</sup> Century challenges, happenings and development.

Some relevant questions asked by Ikem and Reuben (2012) required answers in relation to the expedition of Social Studies education in Nigeria. The answers to these questions can ascertain the exact status of Mezieobi's et al (2013) claim. These questions are:

- a) What has been happening to poverty?
- b) What has been happening to unemployment?
- c) What has been happening to inequality?
- d) What gave rise to high profile corruption in the society?
- e) Why the high rate of insecurity?
- f) Why such intimidating injustice in the society?
- g) Why corrupt public officials are not properly prosecuted?

These questions are the outcomes of the present state of development in Nigeria and most developing nations of the world. A nation that is tending towards growth and development must focus on reorientation and reorganization of institutions and transformation of the citizens' wellbeing. On the contrary, a vast space continues to subsist between anticipated changes and actual practices in Social Studies Education in Nigeria. As a result of this, Udoukpong (1998) posits that Nigeria lacks a clear direction for the purpose, method and content of teaching Social Studies that would have addressed many developmental challenges in Nigeria. Nevertheless, Enoch (2009) held education responsible for the snail pace of development in Nigeria. To achieve the anticipated results, he maintains that the school curriculum has to be re-examined and reorganized to be in consonance with the vision of the national development desired. This connote that the goals of Social Studies curriculum is yet to be achieved, thus, broad goals and objectives are left unaccomplished even after about five decades of its introduction in the Nigerian educational system. This is

indicated by a society exemplified by moral decadence, religious intolerance, corruption, tribal crises and terrorism such as that of Boko Haram amongst others. These social vices and ills are issues which Social Studies was supposed to have addressed. One of the other rationales for the adoption of Social Studies as inaugurated by the Mombasa Conference in 1968, was that the new subject is supposed to enable every school-going child in Africa to understand peoples' interaction with their cultural, social and physical environment, appreciate heritage, develop skills and attitudes expected of citizens and learn to express ideas in various ways (Meryfied & Mutebi, 1991).

As valuable as the subject is to the moral and intellectual development of the child as well as the acquisition of required skills for building the nation, there have been gaps in the Nigeria Social Studies curriculum. The subject is offered in the primary and junior secondary schools in the country but not offered at the senior secondary school level, making it difficult for proper shift from the secondary to the tertiary level of education (Onuoha, 2009; Uchechukwu, 2011; AbuduKabir, 2014). It is obvious that the new Social Studies curriculum at the senior secondary school is suffering from lack of implementation. In the absence of the necessary political, administrative and professional support and commitment for the new Social Studies curriculum at the senior secondary school level in Nigeria, it would be very difficult to implement the new curriculum.

However, no authority can completely mourn the total failure of Social Studies Education in Nigeria. Social Studies Education has been recognized by scholar such as Edinyang and Ubi (2013) as a powerful tool that has assisted the achievement of national development goals through the production of responsible citizens that are contributing to the growth of the society. This can be perceived from the citizens' behavioral dispositions which may consist of dedication, honesty, dedication, productivity amongst others.

### **Functions of Social Studies Education in Nigeria**

The introduction of Social Studies education into Nigerian school curriculum is a landmark

in Nigerian educational system. This is due to the fact that it instills in the citizens the act of patriotism to the country thereby promoting national unity which is essential to our development as a nation. It contribute in achieving national objective by relying on its unique methodology using inquiry, problematic, project activities and other approaches to expose learners to the nitty gritty of various situation, so that they can arrive at their own self-reliant, conclusions based on reasoned decisions. In the light of this, Okam (2007) and Ikwumelu and Oyibe (2011) assert that Social Studies produce citizens with effective civic competences needed for the growth and development of a nation.

Social studies education in Nigeria has a special duty to perform in transforming Nigeria into a modern state. They include healing the social, political and economical wounds of the past decades, fostering the 21<sup>st</sup> Century hopes in good ethnic group relationship and patriotism, and the stimulating productive reforms to make the nation a just and fair society. It also helps to cultivate the desire for self-reliance, national growth and development amongst others.

Moreover, Social Studies education contributes in the realization of national goals through Citizenship Education. Citizenship education can be defined as educating children, from early childhood, to become clear-thinking and enlightened citizens who participate in decisions concerning society. 'Society' is here understood in the special sense of a nation with a circumscribed territory which is recognized as a state (Meyer, 1995; Kizlik, 2013). A citizen however, is one who conforms to certain accepted practices, holds a particular belief that is loyal to certain values, participates in certain activities and conforms to norms which are often local in character.

It contribute in making citizens understand the diversity among the people of Nigeria and further motivates them to view the cooperation and consequent dependence among them which are among the major ingredients of nation-building and further plays the role of making the people appreciate and respect the cultural diversity of Nigeria and to realize the need for

cooperation, unity and peace in the country (Sheshi, 2002).

### **Objectives, Roles and Prospect of Social Studies Education for an All-Round Development of Contemporary Learners**

Objectives, roles and prospects of Social Studies Education for an All-Round Development of Contemporary Learners include:

1. Create awareness of and sensitivity to man's environment;
2. Influence man's attitudes positively to social, cultural political values and total environment;
3. Enable men to acquire skills for solving societal and environmental problems;
4. Equip men with the basic understanding of the knowledge of the total environment; and
5. Encourage voluntary participation in social and civic duties while developing the sense of Responsibility (Bozimo & Ikwumelu, 2009; Uchechukwu, 2011; Abubakar, 2013:3)

Other roles played by Social Studies for an all-round development of contemporary learners amongst others include:

1. The development of national consciousness and commitment as necessary ingredients for nation building;
2. The inculcation of social value and skills for active social life;
3. The development of intellectual skills, knowledge and abilities for better understanding of the immediate and remote environment;
4. Developing rational thinking ability for practical social life;
5. Identifying and solving problems using problem solving techniques; and
6. Promoting value awareness and utilization of some values in tackling dynamic problems in the society (Mezieobi, 1994; Ikwumelu & Oyibe, 2011).

### **Problems Combating Against the Achievement of Social Studies Objectives for an All-Round Development of Contemporary Learners in Nigeria**

Scholars like Alapiki and Ibodje (1996), Alapiki and Barikor (2002); Alapiki, 2005; and as well as Adesina (2010) assert that problems wagging wars against the achievement of Social Studies objectives in Nigeria include poor teaching methods; poor motivation in terms of remuneration for teachers; corruption by law enforcement agents and politicians; and the inconsistencies of government policies with regard to education; and politics of ethnicity and political crises amongst others. Other problems militating against the achievement of Social Studies objectives in Nigeria include:

- 1. Lack of and or inadequate instructional materials/resources:** Lack of and or inadequate instructional resources hinder the successful implementation of the curriculum for both skills and values in students. To improve the quality of Social Studies and to inculcate moral values in the students through the curriculum, there should be adequate instructional resources for Social Studies teachers in all schools. Several studies (Jekayinfa, 2005; Onyeachu, 2008; Adesina, 2010) have shown that there is lack or shortage of instructional materials in Nigerian schools and this is one of the major factors hindering the achievement of Social Studies objectives. They also posit that the lack of and or insufficient instructional resources gave students little opportunities for the acquisition of knowledge and the development of skills, values, and attitudes required to sustain and improve their way of life and actively participate in the development of the society. In the same vein, Chapin and Messick (2002) and Onyeachu (2008) affirm that lack of or inadequate instructional resources influences teachers' decisions in the classrooms. They further stress that teachers have not fully implemented Social Studies curricula effectively at all levels because of shortages in instructional resources
- 2. Lack of transparency, incoherence, and contradiction in junior secondary school Social Studies syllabus:** This is evident in the junior secondary school Social Studies syllabus and this issue has contributed to the failure of Social Studies in the quest to achieve its objectives (National Council for Social Studies, NCSS, 2009). In the light of this, Kizlik (2013) and AbdulKabir (2014) eloquently affirm that the junior secondary school's Social Studies syllabus was too broad and ambiguous for junior secondary students. This indicates that the Social Studies curriculum used in Nigerian junior secondary school is too broad and difficult for some students to comprehend. In other words, there are too many topics to be covered within a short period that there is literally no time to integrate moral or societal values in the teaching and learning processes.
- 3. Marginalization of Teachers' in Curriculum Process (Development/Review/Reform):** Non-involvement of teachers in curriculum planning and decision-making would lead to ineffective implementation and paralyze teaching and learning processes. In the opinions of Nigeria Education Sector Diagnosis (2005) and Ben- Peretz (1980) cited in AbuduKabir (2014), teacher involvement in the curriculum development process is of great importance, either in the definition of the problems or the presentation of concrete solutions in the form of programmes of studies. In the same vein, Onyeachu (2008) and Adewuya (2013) found that teachers who are crucial agents in interpreting and implementing the curriculum were not involved in the curriculum development process in Nigeria. They further opine that this may lead to teacher misconceptions and misinterpretation of the purpose of the subject. This could possibly be the reason why Onyeachu (2008) eloquently purport that "for the set objectives of secondary education to be achieved, teachers must be involved in decision-making and planning of curriculum" (p. 568). Aforementioned

discourse connote that teachers are major factor in the successful implementation of any curriculum at any educational level because they are the “implementers” but it is quite unfortunate that a “Top – Down Approach” is being employed by curriculum developers (Fullan 1993 cited in Department of Education and Science in Dublin, 2005). This is an approach where by teachers are given the curriculum to implement without little or no contribution to the curriculum development.

- 4. Non- implementation of Social Studies Curriculum at the Senior Secondary School in Nigeria:** Similarly, Jekayinfa (2005) and AbuduKabir (2013) found that Social Studies was not included in the senior secondary school in Nigeria which hinders the subject’s ability to achieve its aims and objectives in learners. The inability to implement the curriculum in senior secondary schools in the opinions of Jekayinfa was due to some errors and omissions of some vital aspects that distort the final document. Thus, in order to inculcate positive values in students as well as instill skills and knowledge to eradicate the moral decadence in Nigerian societies’, Social Studies should be included in our senior secondary school curriculum. Similarly, analysis of the curriculum also reveals that concepts on moral inculcation were not well incorporated. Such concepts included cooperation and conflict, civic rights and responsibilities, fundamental human rights, conflict resolutions, cultural norms, and citizens’ obligations in the society.

#### Recommendations

1. Social Studies Curriculum should be made to address emergent issues challenging the nation. That is, it should be made to address evolving issues that are defying the nation. The issues that are detrimental to national development include corruption, terrorism, tribalism, armed robbery, suicide bombing amongst others.
2. Social Studies contents at all educational level should be designed to include work ethics, dedication, honesty, national ideals and values, democratic principles, skills for data collection and analysis, decision-making process and problems solving techniques.
3. Students should be taught to demonstrate commitments, knowledge, skills and positive attitudes so as to foster effective participation in national economic and democratic activities.
4. There should be a deliberate effort to intensify the methodologies for Social Studies teaching with a view to actualizing the quest for national development. Social Studies teaching methodologies should concentrate on stimulating and inquiry-based approach. It should be incorporative and flexible to boost a reformative discipline that will make a route for national development.

#### Conclusion

The implementation of Social Studies curriculum in Nigerian school system has fallen short of its intended mission, even after five decades of its complete implementation. Therefore, the subject has not achieved its objectives in Nigeria. This is evident in incessant social ills such as moral decadence, religious intolerance, corruption, terrorism, child trafficking, child abuse, armed robbery, suicide bombing amongst others. In other words, for Social Studies to realize its objectives in Nigeria, emphasis should be given to character and personality development, knowledge, skills and positive values that would sustain the individuals and the Nigerian society.

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