

SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION AND THE TEACHING OF EMERGING ISSUES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

As the world is dynamic and new issues, ideas and phenomena are emerging, there is the need for social studies education, which is a unique and peculiar type of education for helping human beings, to achieve sustainable development in the country. Consequently, this study examined how the teaching of emerging issues in Social Studies can be used to attain sustainable development in the country. The study adopted a descriptive survey method to trace the nature, scope, objectives and curriculum of social studies coupled with how the teaching of emerging issues in social studies can lead to sustainable development in the country. The study revealed that the teaching of emerging issues in social studies would lead to sustainable development as the learners will develop the spirit of oneness, honesty, tolerance of one-another, gender equality, hatred for drug abuse, good environmental disposition and friendly interaction among one-another despite their different race, religion and ethnic affiliations. It is therefore recommended that the government at all levels should fund education adequately and government should provide platform for the meetings of stakeholders in education sector to brainstorm on ways of using education for sustainable development.

Introduction

The maxim “change is inevitable” is accepted by many people. Reasons for this might not be unconnected with the fact that human beings are daily confronted with new challenges in an ever complex world. Attesting to the foregoing, Akinlaye, Mansaray and Ajiboye (1996), affirm that human being's life is a series of confrontation with oneself, with other people, with societal institutions and with one's environment. In order to reduce this complexity that human beings found themselves in education stands out as a potent instrument for achieving it. The onus therefore lies on the country's educational system to equip the citizens with the mechanisms of dealing with newly emerging dilemmas effective for

themselves and for the society (Akinlaye, Mansaray & Ajiboye, 1996).

Presently, there are many emerging issues that need urgent attention to be handled through the country's educational system. Some of these issues that are of immediate concerns in the society include population and family life education, gender sensitivity, drug abuse education, environmental education, multi-cultural education, human trafficking education, among others. These issues are not to be taught in separate subjects in the classrooms. They are phenomena that can be well-integrated into an existing subject and the subject is social studies which in the words of Kissock (1981), in Bozimo and Ikwumelu (2009), is a programme of study which a society uses to instill in the students

the knowledge, skills, attitudes and actions it considers important concerning the relationship human beings have with one other, their world and themselves.

From the foregoing, one can see that the place of education in promoting sustainable development cannot be over-emphasized as education is the instrument that can be used for driving the nation's development. It is through the teaching of the contents of the emerging issues in social studies education that some of the challenges and social vices in the society can be tackled such as corruption, kidnapping, drug addiction, unemployment, pollution, rituals among others. It is when courses such as environmental education, insurgency and security education, drug-abuse and other emerging issues are taught that the citizens would be deeply acquainted with the knowledge that they have to put in their best to solve most of these societal challenges in order to make the society better and safer to live

Social Studies Education

Different scholars have defined Social Studies because the discipline covers a wide range of studies since it takes and uses concepts, ideas, skills, knowledge, attitudes and values from the Social Science subjects. As diverse as these definitions are, they are in line with that of Ajiboye (2009) who sees Social Studies as a school subject that is out to make enquiries: investigate, discovers, discuss, experiment and acquire experience, in order to make decisions on social issues and problems and find solutions to them.

Akinlaye *et al* (1996) describes social studies as a process of education which utilizes the study of human life for the purpose of giving the children the opportunity to solve problems of crucial

importance both for the individual and the society. This and other definitions clearly underscore the fact that Social Studies has an in-built mechanism that embraces its dynamism. It is a school subject that sets out to direct and give learners a freehand and opportunity to make decisions on social issues and find solutions to them.

The dynamism in social studies is reflected in its capacity to absorb new and emerging issues in the society due to the nature and scope of the subject. The flexible nature of the subject places it in a vantage position to accommodate emerging social, political, economic and other global issues. Since human beings realities are not static, they are ever changing, so Social Studies is being used as a career subject integrating most emerging issues across the world.

Objectives of Social Studies Teaching in Nigeria

Generally, objectives provide the direction and help in eliminating wastage of time and resources. Bozimo and Ikwumelu (2009) posit that by stating one's objectives, one can choose a course of action and have a basis for selecting and organizing instructional materials and methodologies.

Social studies as a discipline has its own objectives just as other disciplines do. Akinlaye *et al* (1996) state that these objectives specify the kinds of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that could accrue to the learners through learning the subject. In order to achieve the over-all nature of social studies, Dubey (1980) have identified the following as the subjects' objectives:

- The promotion of national unity and economic development
- The development of good citizenship, the upliftment of moral character and the promotion of

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social understanding of everyday problems that they may face as adults,

- The development of critical thinking, problem solving and decision making for the survival and progress of the nation
- In general, Social Studies education aspires to achieve humanistic, citizenship and value education.

These objectives are geared towards the reduction of the complexity of the environment and the necessity of constant learning.

Social studies help in achieving the goals of building a united, viable and prosperous Nigeria since the subject seeks to achieve national unity and survival. In social studies, we learn about the cultural aspects of the different groups in Nigeria. One of the major problems facing Nigeria since independence is the absence of national unity. When Nigerians understand and appreciate their differences, develop genuine cooperation and a high sense of commitment to nation building, they will be able to attain the unity of the country. Also, in a situation where Nigeria is plagued with social problems and indiscipline among adults and youths, social studies is essential to building a strong and united nation by combating the social vices.

These objectives imply that any Social Studies programme should be relevant to the need and ideals of problem-solving and value clarification. Thus, what social studies is teaching is not just selected haphazardly, but it follows as procedure which agrees with the realization of its objectives.

Social Studies Curriculum

One of the unique characteristics of social studies as a school subject is its

dynamism which allows for its ability to incorporate the needs of the society. Social studies curriculum is aimed at training students for their role in meeting the needs of the society in the future. The unique nature of social studies in deriving its purpose and scope directly from the currently perceived needs of the society makes it more sensitive to changes in the society than other subjects. These needs change as circumstances in the society change and come at different rates which are reflected in the social studies curriculum.

Similarly, as social studies has to do with the realities of man's existence on the surface of the earth, problems and issues keep emerging, therefore social studies with its eclectic nature has to be designed in such a way as to accommodate and address any emerging problems and issues in the society. This nature also enables social studies various methodologies to take into consideration the needs of students and different intellectual abilities in the classrooms so as to achieve its objectives of ultimate effective social participation of all students in the community life (Akinlaye *et al*, 1996)

Sustainable Development Concept

The term sustainable development according to Ajayi and Afolabi (2009), entails better living conditions for all citizens, producing more nutrition and very sumptuous food for all citizens to eat, individual living healthier, happier and more comfortable life, sound education and enlightenment among the populace, improved transportation and communication system, scientific and technological advancement and gainful employment for all citizens. On the otherhand, Munainghe (2004) sees sustainable development as a process of improving the range of opportunities that

will enable individuals and communities to achieve their aspirations and full potential over a sustained period of time while maintaining the resilience of economic, social and environmental system.

Also, the World Commission on Environment and Development (2000) defines sustainable development as a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own demands. Furthermore, sustainable development can also be seen as a process in which the natural resources base of a nation is not allowed to deteriorate but utilized optimally for the benefits of the present and future citizens.

In line with the above views, one can deduce that sustainable development requires that all programmes should be for the well-being of the society, to have considerable plans with positive effect in order to maintain and sustain balance in the pursuit of development and improve quality of life of the people in the society. From all indications, sustainable development entails improvement of the condition of the people and the nation at large. This cannot be done in vacuum, as it is the teaching of the emerging issues in social studies education that would enable the learners would be able to identify and tackle the emerging global problems and challenges thereby assisting in ensuring sustainable development globally.

Emerging Curricula Issues in Social Studies Education

The world is so dynamic that with the dawn of every new day emerges new issues, phenomena, ideas, information and facts. These issues are not to be ignored but adapted for the benefit and sustainable development of the country. The problem is how these issues would be understood and

taught to the children. Awopetu (2000) thus concludes that floating a new subject to cater for the emerging areas is necessarily not the solution to it. Similarly, Adufe (2000) says that curricula innovation is an unending discussion as long as the new ideas develop through invention and natural occurrences, curricula contents will need to be improved upon. Both researchers did not advocate for a new subject but rather an improvement upon the existing curriculum to accommodate any emerging areas that are of educational importance.

The nature and scope of social studies put it in a vantage position to accommodate these emerging areas. In social studies, one of the identified organizing centres around which contents are selected and organized is that of societal themes, that is, central ideas about the functioning of the society. They are identified through the analysis of the problems and issues that are imminent in the society. (Akinlaye *et al* 1996). This is what is regarded as functionalism in social studies and it encapsulates a social studies programme that develops in children the skills that are germane to their survival, improving their standard of living, raising their food supply, increasing their housing units, advance their level of community health and even preserving the values that are necessary for peaceful co-habitation.

Emerging Issues, Challenges and Sustainable Development

Multi-cultural education: Multi-cultural education deals with students learning about the various racial, ethnic, gender and class groups that comprise the population (Stone, 1991). It extends learning to incorporate peoples and places outside the student's immediate environments and aims at teaching the universal elements of human

experience. Through the teaching of multi-cultural education, learners would know that it is possible to see Indians, Americans, Chinese and Nigerian learning together in the same classrooms. These are learners with different cultural background and possibly with different religious views. The coming together of the learners with different personal and cultural experiences under the same classrooms would promote sustainable development as the learners would benefit and learn from one-another through their interactions with themselves, they would understand the need for countries to interact and relate together. This will foster cordial international relation among countries and thereby promote peace and unity globally.

Environmental education: It is concerned with educational process of knowledge, understanding attitudes, skills and commitment to environmental problems and consideration. Environmental education has gone beyond learning about pollution as it includes themes such as sustainable development and these are issues that meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Environmental education stresses the importance of resource conservation through sustainable development and the idea that conservation and development are naturally interdependent (Ajiboye&Silo, 2009). Through the teaching of Environmental Education, citizens would realize the need for awareness of human activities which enable them to be able tackle environmental challenges and thereby keep the whole world away from the environmental hazards and consequently promote sustainable development.

Specifically, through the teaching of environmental education, the learners would not only be able to identify some of the environmental challenges in the country like pollution, deforestation, flood, waste disposal among others, but they would also be able to proffer solutions to these environmental hazards in order to promote healthy living in the society and therefore ensure sustainable development.

Population and family life education: It is an education programme for a study of the population situation in the family, community, nation and the world in order to develop in the students' rationale and responsible attitude and behaviour towards that situation. Basically, Population Education is designed to improve and increase peoples' knowledge and awareness of the causes and consequences of population rate at the family, community, national and international levels.

Population and family life education were introduced as possible measures for checking the geometrical growth in population around the world. Through the teaching of population and family life education, it will enable the citizens to be aware of the core messages in this programme among which are adequate family size, and family welfare, the need for delayed marriage, responsible parenthood and population related values, when all these values are embedded in the citizens, sustainable development would be attained in the country as the knowledge of the discipline would prevent the learners from living reckless life and thereby ensure that they would be able to have normal family members that they can maintain.

Gender sensitive education: Gender in the view of Sofadekan (2001) denotes the

different and unequal perceptions, views, roles, relevance and rewards which a society assign to men and women through its culture. It is a culturally and socially constructed difference between males and females found in the meaning, beliefs and practice associated with “femininity” and “masculinity”. (Kendall, 2007).

In Africa, like in many parts of the world, women are seen as human beings with lower intelligence, inferior and weak, hence she needs little education unlike her male counterpart. Similarly she is not given any political role and her place is the home where she is given a great proportion of household chores.

Through the teaching of gender sensitivity in social studies education, it will correct the ills of gender inequality which regularly exposing women to various forms of physical, psychological, sexual and emotional violence which are due to unequal power relations between men and women in the society. Similarly, women would be able to aspire to any political office and assist their husbands in providing essential basic amenities needed at home to maintain the family. If the family setting is peaceful, then the country as a whole will be peaceful, which is an essential ingredient of sustainable development in a country.

Drug abuse education: Drug abuse has taken a worrisome dimension in the society with series of consequences in homes, schools and communities. Some of the abused drugs are cocaine, heroin, opium, cannabis among others. Many of the people that indulge in drugs are into violent crimes like kidnapping, assassination, rape, armed robbery and so on. Thus, they pose serious threat to the security of lives and properties of both the present and future generation.

Through the teaching of drug abuse, learner's misconception about drug abuse would be corrected and it would strengthen their protective factors including positive decision-making and commitment. With this effort, the risk factors of drug abuse such as aggressive behaviour, poor social skills and academic difficulties would have been tackled. The teaching of drug abuse education to learners would prevent them from being involved in the act, and this will be to the advantage of the nation. This will consequently promote sustainable development as the nation will be drug-free.

Technical and vocational education: It is the type of education that refers to those aspects of educational process involving in addition to general education the study of technology and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills activities, understanding the knowledge relating to occupation. Technical and vocational education is a deliberate intervention to bring about learning which world makes people more productive in designated areas of economic activities such as economic sector, occupations, and specific work tasks among others.

This type of education will involve knowledge, skills insight and mindsets which are deemed to be generally valuable for the learners, not only in designated areas of economic activity but also for the larger and full time courses for youths which aim at achieving mastery of performance in specified roles or tasks. Vocational education therefore prepares people to work in various jobs as a trader a craftsman or as a technician. It is thus apparent that through the teaching of vocational and technical education, the learners would be able to acquire skills that will develop entrepreneurial acumen in them and this

would make them the spirit of self-reliance and self-sustenance needed for sustainable development.

Insurgency and security education: It is an educational programme designed to ensure the protection of the individual or citizens in order to secure him or the citizenry from various hazards and vicissitudes of social life or social risks which include terrorism, kidnapping, and rebellion among others. Insurgency and security education is aimed at keeping away rebellion against authority when those taking part in the rebellion are not recognized as belligerent.

Insurgency is an interlocking system of actions which may be political, economic, psychological, military that aims at the over-thrown of the established authority in a country and its replacement by another regime. Among the incidences of insurgencies and insecurity in the country include the activities of the Boko Haram sects, the indigenous people of Biafra (IPOB), kidnapers, ritualists and Niger Delta avengers threatening to vandalize the oil pipeline facilities in the country. Through the teaching of insurgency and security education, the citizen would be acquainted with the knowledge of self-defense and the steps to take in case the country is under attack.

Conclusion

The paper posits that if all the emerging areas in social studies are taught in schools by well-trained teachers and all the identified benefits of the emerging areas are inculcated by the learners, sustainable development would be accomplished as the new areas will serve as stepping stone towards achieving this goal in the country. Specifically, the various emerging issues would enable the citizens to discharge their

civic responsibilities, tolerate and respect one-another, combat the evils of the social vices, tackle the environmental challenges such as pollution, deforestation, waste disposal and be able to develop the spirit of self-reliance and self-sustenance that would promote sustainable development in the country.

Recommendations

Based on the position of this paper on the need to promote sustainable development in Nigeria, the following are suggested:

- Government at all levels should give education priority through giving it adequate funding to carry out researches that can promote sustainable development.
- There should be an urgent social studies curriculum review by educational stakeholders to reflect more pressing social problems in Nigeria.
- Qualified social studies teachers should be employed to teach the course with the emerging issues in various educational institutions.
- Curricula of tertiary institutions in Nigeria should be more pragmatic with in-built training programmes which will enable all students acquire relevant entrepreneurial skills required for self-employment and wealth creation
- Citizens should be well-acquainted with the knowledge and skills to combat unforeseen environmental and security challenges in the country
- Workshops, seminars and refresher courses should be organized for social studies teachers to equip them with knowledge of the various strategies to use in effectively teaching the emerging issues.

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