

SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION: A CATALYST FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This paper examined the curricula context of social studies education in the advancement of sustaining national development. Attention was focused on conceptualizing the subject matter as a discipline vis-à-vis its objectives. It further dwelt on the need for repositioning of social studies education in Nigeria for sustainable national development which is identified as good citizenship, development of consciousness, knowledge of significant development in human societies, development of critical thought, fostering of national unity and moral education. Social studies as a discipline strive to fill national objectives thereby leading to national development. In view of this, it should be strengthened as a catalyst for the advancement of sustainable national development.

Introduction

Social studies as a problem-solving discipline, equips an individual with the knowledge, attitude, skills, capacities and capabilities needed to make meaningful living in the content of the immediate peculiar environment, and to solve the problem of human survival globally. The rationale for social studies education as a discipline is premised on the ability of the curricular area to contribute to the solution of social problems resulting from human behaviour and to foster appropriate values. Ogundare (2004) agreed that the development of critical thinking, reflective decision-making and the ability to analyze issues logically and solve problem are stressed in social studies. A prominent objective of social studies is to develop a sympathetic appreciation of the diversity and interdependence of all members of the local community, and the wider national and international community. The discipline recognizes the interdependence nature of human beings and the need for cooperation at the local, national and international level.

The role of social studies as a school discipline in addressing Nigeria socio-political, economic and other related problems cannot be sidelined. This is because the discipline will not only assist the youth to understand the society, people and their problems, but also will equipped them with the knowledge, understanding and competences to assist in the society. Ezeuzo (2011) corroborates this view as she asserts that social studies education no doubt is a veritable tool for promotion of peace, harmony and sustainable development in Nigeria. It should be equally noted that social studies as a subject has its objectives which originated from the Nigeria's National Objectives (Okonkwo, 2004).

These five national objectives are:

- A free and democratic society;
- A just and egalitarian society;
- A united, strong and self-reliance nation;
- A great and dynamic economy; and,
- A land of bright and full of opportunities for all citizens (FRN, 2004).

A cursory observation of these national objectives revealed that they are

mainly for strengthening peace and unity of Nigeria for national development. If this assertion is true, social studies objectives originates from national objectives and its contents is structured towards the achievement of the stated objectives and therefore making it possible to bring unity and progress for Nigeria's national and sustainable development.

There is no doubt that education is an important lever towards economic development and social progress. This is because it is one central activity through which human resources of a country can be developed. However, it is through the total engagement of our productive capacity that we can ensure a self-sustained development in a multi-national country like Nigeria.

Kissock (1981) justified that social studies is used in Nigeria to inculcate the concept of nationalism, unity and dependence among a diverse citizenry. It is through social studies education that individuals are trained to acquire knowledge, useful skills, desirable values, attitudes and habits to adjust themselves to the condition of the world in which they live.

The core objective of social studies education is creating awareness of opportunities that can be available in ones environment as well as inculcating necessary skills that can enable one to live effectively in ones environment. These skills are to be fully developed through the teaching and learning of social studies. These skills include skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing, calculation, decision-making as well as those of observation, analysis, synthesis and inference. These skills that learners acquire would enable them to contribute their own quota to the development of their society. If the problems of the society are to be addressed, social studies should be used to

catch them young. It is on this premise that this paper attempt to assess social studies education as impetus for achieving sustainable development in Nigeria

Conceptualizing Social Studies

Current definitions of social studies do not properly reflect its growing global applications. Three factors, which are included in all social studies programme, can be used to give focus and direction to the use of the concept on a global scale. First, in all cases, social studies is a programme of study. It utilizes a period of time within the school curriculum which is set aside for presenting instructional content. Second, social studies programmes are creative of the society in which they are implemented. They are instituted in response to needs which are defined by the society and thus change over time as those needs changes. Third, all social studies programmes emphasize the relationships human beings have with their physical and social world

Using these three components a definition of the concept of social studies was ascertained by Ogundare (2004). This definition simultaneously reflects the global application of social studies and offers a perspective which facilitates the development of instructional programmes in any society in the world.

Social studies is a programme of study which a society uses to instill in students the knowledge, skills, attitudes and actions it considers important concerning the relationship human beings have with each other, their world, and themselves

Using this definition, social studies becomes a curriculum programme with a given amount of time set aside for its presentation. However it is pertinent to emphasize here that social studies deal with

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the problems of human survival, as a result, it has no single universally accepted definition. Its definitions are as many as there are authorities in the field and different societies with their peculiar problems. Social studies consider some peculiar problem of a country like lack of unity, peace and lack of development.

Concept of Sustainable Development

Social studies education is identified as a potent instrument that can engineer national development by helping to produce responsible citizens who will maximally contribute to the building of a useful society.

Seers (1977) perceived development as involving not only economic growth but also condition in which people in a country have adequate food and job and the income inequality among them is greatly reduced. According to him, the questions to ask about a country's development are three, namely:

- (i) What has been happening to poverty?
- (ii) What has been happening to unemployment?
- (iii) What has been happening to inequality?

If all the three have declined from high levels, then the country has witnessed a period of development. Sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present without disrupting the plans of the future or the plans and development that are presently remarkable and have standing qualities to promote the plans of the future. Soubbotima (2004) opines that sustainable development is a process in which natural resources base is not allowed to deteriorate. They emphasized the hitherto unappreciated role of environmental quality and environmental inputs in the process of raising real income and the quality of life.

In addition, sustainable development implies the consideration of good health, the protection of the social and physical environment and the provision of economic security. 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.

Emerging Issues in Social Studies Education towards Fostering Sustainable Development

There is no doubt that education is an important lever towards economic development and social progress. This is because it is one central activity through the human resources of a country can be developed. However, it is through the total engagement of our productive capacity can we ensure of self-sustained development in a multi-national country like Nigeria.

Based on the national education objectives stated in the National Policy on Education (1998) social studies objectives are drawn for teaching in the Nigerian schools to create an awareness and an understanding of our social and physical environment in order to conserve it for national development. It develops in human beings a capacity to learn and acquire certain basic skills of literacy, numeracy and critical thinking essential to the forming of sound judgment concerning social, economic and political issues.

With social studies objectives reflecting the needs of the society, one easily understands the usefulness of social studies education as a process of education which examines ways of working in the society in

order to understand social problems and thereby, seek solutions to them.

The social problems that beset Nigeria as a nation in the recent times are cog in the wheel of progress towards sustainable development. Among others, the problems of ethnicity and religion intolerance, inequalities among Nigeria citizens, environmental degradation, insecurity etc. appears as impediments to achieving sustainable development goals in Nigeria.

However, there are some emerging issues in social studies education that can be used to solve the aforementioned problems and assure of us of sustainable development. Advocates of multi-cultural education are of the opinion that teaching and learning are cultural processes that take place in a social context. If so, then teaching and learning should be made accessible and equitable for a wide variety of students' cultures clearly. This can only be possible by analyzing education from multiple cultural perspectives and thereby removing the blindness imposed on education by dominant cultural experiences. Adetoro and Omiyefa (2012) describe multi-cultural education as a field of study and an emerging discipline whose major aim is to create equal educational opportunities for students from diverse, racial, ethnic, religious, social-class and cultural groups.

In order to achieve sustainable development goals, we (citizens of Nigeria) owe our country and governments certain basic duties and obligations. This development prepares individuals for social responsibilities and makes them become socially and politically aware, and integrated into the social milieu. Civic education as an emerging discipline exposes us to an awareness about our legal right and privileges under the law and the

constitution, our duties and obligations as citizen of the land. It expose citizens to the political realities of our times and land, including those ethnic and political problems that separate us and what efforts are being made to solve these problems. The ultimate aims of Civic education is however summarized as a developed and a responsible citizens, who will be committed to the skills, values as well as principles of Nigerian Constitutions as a whole to make sustainable development a reality in Nigeria (Olatide&Alonge, 2015)

As a plural society, many forces tend to pull the Nigeria state. Plurality in the real sense can be seen in terms of the various ethnic groups, cultures, religions and languages. The responsibility of any government is to promote good cultural values which social studies as a discipline advocates. In the present Nigerian situation, it appears the cultural values transmitted to the society are the culture of violence, corruption, immorality, dishonesty, conflicts etc. These are certainly not worthwhile values that can move any nation forward.

The subject, social studies however take it as problematic the issue of bringing up everybody with approved responsibility. In view of this, bringing people up as purposeful, useful and functional members of the society should not be left to mere chance. Children have to be educated formally and systematically on this. How this is to be done is the business and soul aim of Social Studies Education (Ogunbameru, 2006)

In another development, a nation can only develop to the fullest when its citizens have good knowledge and in-depth awareness about the environment and associated challenges so that necessary skills and expertise could be developed to

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address the challenges. Environmental awareness and understanding of environmental challenges is only possible through environmental education which is another important emerging issue in social studies education for sustainable development.

Social studies consider some peculiar problems of a country. The most serious problem facing Nigeria today is unity. Nigeria should do what will foster unity, peace and development of the country. Social studies solves our daily problems like corruption, dishonesty, lack of patriotism and so on hence we cannot do without it. With social studies education sustainable development can be assured.

The Need for Repositioning Social Studies Education in Nigeria for Sustainable National Development

It is the considered position of this paper that Nigeria's hope as a surviving sovereign nation depends largely on the task of repositioning social studies education. Some of our foremost educationist like Ukeje (2000), Okam (2002) and Obanya (2004) generally endorsed that organized and repositioned social studies education is perhaps the greatest and most potent tool that man has invested and developed ostensibly for his continued development and progress. Ukeje (2000) expatiates further that the reason for this is because "education is so powerful, that it can heal, it can build up and it can lift up individuals, groups or societies for improvement and continued progress. Indeed, the need for repositioning social studies education curriculum content for sustainable national development is ensconced in Ukeje (2000) statement; whatever you want in the society, you put it in the school; if you want an honest society, you teach honesty in the

school; that the school is the manufacturer of the society; and that the society is changed by the school.

It is an established truism that repositioning social studies education is largely instrumental for transforming such developed countries of the world like "United States of America, Japan, Germany, Britain, France, Russia, China, South and North Korea and many others (Gele, 2010). In Britain, the emphasis is largely on the employment of social studies discipline in training for character building for the success of monarchical welfare state. In France, organized and repositioned social studies education is largely used in sharpening the intellect and for the transmission of culture generally. In the United States of America (USA) repositioning social studies education is used for the development of individual qualities necessarily for good citizenship and for the success of democracy. In Russia, repositioning social studies education is used for advancement of communism (Ogunfunmilakin, 2015).

Therefore, this paper is of the opinion that repositioning social studies education can be used in Nigeria to achieve peace in the Niger Delta region, suicide bombing and Boko-Haram insurgency in the North East, rigging of election, cultism in institutions of learning, students unrest, fighting, stealing, armed robbery, examination malpractice, kidnappings, assassination, religious conflicts and many other social vices in our society. Nigerian society requires massive re-organization, redirection, national rebirth, reconstruction and repositioning through the teaching and learning of social studies in all levels of our educational development. Nigeria must move from retrogression to development and indeed join the club of developed nations of the world.

Conclusion

Social studies as a subject in our primary and post primary schools is an answer to societal and national problems. It is a problem solving -oriented discipline in which man studies and learns about problems of survival in his environment. From all indications one can conclude that social studies education as a problem solving discipline is very important for the unity, peace and development of the country. The subject looks at man in the environment, his action at home, in the family, in the village, in school, at play, in politics, at work, in religious practice and everything man engaging with the aim of survival in the environment in which he lives. Social studies solve our daily problems hence we cannot do without it. With social studies education, sustainable development can be assured.

Recommendations

In view of the fact that social studies education should be strengthened as a catalyst for the advancement of sustainable development, government should show positive commitment to the effective implementation of its curriculum. Current textbooks should be provided and more seminars, conferences and workshops should be organized for teachers handling the subject on regular basis to discuss issues and prospect that affect national development. Nigerians should do justice and make good utilization of the abundant human and material resources given to us by nature. Social vices such as dishonesty, corruption, insecurity and religious intolerance should be well addressed by the government.

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