

CHALLENGES OF TEACHING SOCIAL STUDIES IN JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL IN CROSS RIVER STATE: IMPLICATION FOR QUALITY EDUCATION

BY

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Abstract

This paper examines the challenges of teaching social studies in junior secondary schools in Cross River State and noted the implications for quality education in Nigeria. The paper examined the concept of social studies, the importance/relevance of the subject in building an egalitarian society and the challenges associated with the teaching of the subjects which included ethnicity, non-state standard materials, socio cultural and religion beliefs, teachers competence and evaluation procedure amongst others. It further examined the implications of these challenges in the teaching of the subject to include poor quality education, non-achievement of the objectives of the subject and the learning of unethical moral codes amongst the citizens. Finally, the paper recommended the employment of quality social studies teachers, exposition of social studies teachers to modern methods of teaching the subject and the training and retraining of existing teachers of social studies amongst others.

Key words: Social Studies, Teaching, Quality Education.

1.1 Introduction

Social studies is a growing and dynamic subject which have been firmly entrenched in the curricula of Nigerian schools and Colleges. It is studied at the Primary and Junior Secondary School levels at the Colleges of Education and at the University levels. The subject is also very prominent among many subjects at the nursery and primary school. Nevertheless, there are many emerging issues that challenge the basic objectives of the subject that need urgent attention.

The efforts of education is it that desired and tried to introduce the teaching of Social Studies in schools in Nigeria in the early days served as a catalyst for the introduction of the subject in the school curriculum immediately after independence. Its penetration into the school curriculum at this time could not last long because there were no schools in which the subject could be taught but it was re-introduced in 1963 to assist learners to learn about themselves, societal problems and about the wider communities in which they live. Social Studies, with its unified approach to learning, was seen as being equal to cutting across artificial subject divisions and presenting knowledge as an integrated whole. In this range of vision, the fact that Social Studies in Nigeria deals with an interplay of various factors – political, economic,

cultural, physical, technological - the learner develops different view of reality that helps him or her to make well thought-out reasoned and rational suggestions equipped towards societal development. Nigeria as a nation came into existence from different socio-cultural entities. As a result of these differences, it has not been easy build a sense of common unity, national pride and single purpose. This is because the spirit of unity and oneness at national level is very weak when compared with the moral sense of belonging. Therefore, to bring this goal of building a united, viable and prosperous Nigeria into existence, the school curriculum became the base on which national unity was to be established and fostered. One of such curriculum that seeks to emphasize unity and oneness is social studies. Social Studies is a unique and important subject in Nigeria's educational system. It is a mandatory subject for all Nigerian students in primary and junior secondary schools. However, the impact of the subject in achieving the core subjective of uniting the Nigeria nation has been limited. For example, ethnic loyalty rather than national loyalty continues to improve; the spirit of unity at national level is very weak when compared with the ethnic sense of belonging. This is a pointer to the fact that more is still needed to inculcated the ideals of the subject properly. Several literatures have attempted explanations.

For instant, Mezieobi and Osakwe (2003), Esu and Inyang-Abia (2004), and Mezieobi (2007) have explained that the essence of social studies instruction in junior secondary school is to equip the learner with attitudes, values, knowledge, and skills for functional living in the Nigerian society. It is therefore imperative that effective implementation of social studies instruction in line with the ideals of UBE be focused on equipping the learner with entrepreneurial and creative skills for productive living. Thus, classroom instructions on social studies ought to be innovative in exposing the learner to discover knowledge, create ideas, and think scientifically. This is a veritable process of exposing and preparing the learners to become job creators rather than job seekers in future. Unfortunately Ukadike and Iyamu (2007), stated that social studies teachers do not involve learners adequately in active learning engagement and therefore condemned the expository method which is responsible for the poor implementation of the social studies curriculum and consequent poor appreciation by learners of knowledge, values, attitudes, and skills in the subjects curriculum. The quality of the social studies teachers and the effectiveness of their instructional strategies in the classroom are crucial in the effective implementation of the UBE program. Against this background, Ibiam (2007) noted that rapid technological changes in the society render most often learned materials and information in the social studies classroom obsolete; if the teacher is not resourceful to embrace dynamic changes in the society. Furthermore, Maduewesi (2001) and Ibiam (2007) observed that educational innovations are not instantly integrated into school curricula at all levels in Nigeria. Obuh (2007) discovered that social studies teachers have not demonstrated high competence in the use of ITCs (information and communication technologies) in the teaching of social studies. Therefore from these literatures, the picture of the efforts of social studies in achieving it objectives in bleak, however, the Cross River State experience in another dimension.

1.2 Concept of Social Studies

Social studies is the "integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Social studies is most commonly recognized as the name of a course or set of courses taught in primary and secondary schools or elementary, middle, and secondary schools, but may also refer to the study of aspects of human society at certain post-secondary and tertiary schools around the globe. Many such courses are interdisciplinary and draw upon various fields, including sociology, political science, history, economics, religious studies, geography, psychology, anthropology and civics.

1.3 Challenges of Teaching Social Studies in Junior Secondary Schools In Cross River State

The following are the challenges of teaching social studies:

- a. **State-standard teaching:** Social studies classes are known to be boring and meaningless by many students, especially the junior secondary school students. It's increasing state standards have gradually destroyed many teachers' faith that creative practices can be used due to the pressure to "get through" the material. The central objective of social studies is to assist young people and the society make well-informed, reasoned and intelligent decisions for the public well-being as good citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world. Grooming responsible and reserved citizens is paramount in any governmental system which is essential to a democracy. Now the real challenges lie with the amount of material to be taught and the tedious task it is to convince the secondary school students, especially the junior ones, and policy makers, that the social studies as a subject is vital in their world.
- b. **Ethnicity:** Nigeria is a society comprising people of different social classes, religions, races and ethnic groups. There are comparatively two hundred and fifty different languages and over four hundred dialects. It is the desire of Nigerians to be one unified nation, with a single goal and with a people who share common goals. Since Nigeria achieved independence in 1960, successive governments have sought to inflict this single identity through education, and specifically social studies. In Cross River State, there are over 20 ethnic groups the challenges of teaching social studies to meet the needs of these ethnic and cultural group is enormous.
- c. **Social, cultural and religious beliefs:** Accordingly, after independence, the level of social development in the southern part of the country was to a large extent higher than in the northern part. The effect of this is constant social clash between the people in the North and those in the South. In the process, national boundaries inflicted by colonial masters have resulted in political tensions with separate nations being forced to work together within administrative units. People who had never for once been politically or socially bound to each other, with different histories, cultures, languages, beliefs and social structures have no other choice but to find a way of living and working together. Teachers with different cultural and religious beliefs find themselves teaching social studies and tries to see it that they and their students are seen to accommodate other beliefs system.
- d. **Teachers competence:** Attitudes associated with the teaching of Social Studies appear to affect students' performance in the subject. Also, many Social Studies teachers teach Social Studies without instructional materials and facilities (Mberengwa 2004). The quality of teachers, competence and class room facilities are grossly inadequate and obsolete. Owolabi et al. (1991) indicated that a serious disconnection exists between Social Studies training in secondary schools and the needs of the labour market. Where students consistently perform poorly, the implication is that adequate teaching and learning has not taken place in schools and the blame is majority on the competence of the teachers!
- e. **Evaluation processes:** Social studies education programs are not being constantly evaluated in order to ensure its effectiveness and whether the objectives of the program are being achieved. Feedback mechanism with regard to ensuring whether the stated objectives are being attained or not is only possible through evaluation. Thus, evaluation is an integral part of all educational programs. Unfortunately, instances like lack of effective evaluation in the area of textbooks, instructional materials, teachers, methods as well as inconsistencies of policies affecting social studies, is what characterized the program in Nigeria in general perspective at the Junior Secondary School level.

- f. **Content Development:** The content of Junior Secondary School Social Studies curriculum in Nigeria has often been described as very academic and out of touch with the needs and aspirations of the society. Also, social studies curriculum has not been properly matched with the need of the country. It is the remoteness of the curriculum that makes the subject meaningless in the context of the freshly identified state and national needs. Also the focus of the control of teachers on student learning activity in social studies in the examination syllabus. In other words, teaching is grossly expository and authoritative while learning is a receptive and submissive acceptance of knowledge. Examination success is the prime objective and all activities are directed towards that end. Conformity or convergent thinking stands as a premium and adventurous or creative thinking is personalized or ignored.

1.4 Implication for Quality Education in Cross River State, Nigeria

The following implications area apt:

The first problem is poor quality education. Arising from the challenges associated with the teaching of social studies, the quality of learning and mastering of the subject which ought to be reflected by the practical lives of the students is not achieved. Hence, the education is poor on quality

Secondly, the objectives of the curriculum is not adequately achieved. Hence, rather than unity the state and indeed the nation, the seemingly practical intent is transformed into crises; hatred for each other rather than oneness and love-smacks of educated citizens. The so-called agitations and calls for restructuring of the Nigerian nation is one clear indication that the subject is not achieving its aims.

Thirdly, since the teaching of the subject is bedecked with crises, students learn the wrong and unethical model of passing through examination malpractices. Social ethics are seen as abnormal the attendant implication is the hydra-headed manifestation of examination malpractices in schools which is becoming a norm and resulting in poor school products.

Fourthly, teachers of the subjects are subjected to state-standard stereotype teaching with little or no innovation, emphasizing rote learning and submissive thinking rather than creating the resultant effect is the production of students who are void in critical thinking and many not be able to offer out-of-the-box solution to national problems.

1.5 Suggestions

The suggestions are as follows:

1. Social studies teachers' quality, awareness, consciousness, and adequate knowledge of the objectives and focus of UBE are fundamental in the effective implementation of the functional social studies curriculum.
2. The use of effective inquiry teaching method by the teachers of social studies will enhance high learning and promote creativity and critical thinking
3. Social studies teachers at primary and secondary school levels should be exposed to contemporary reforms in education through conferences, seminars, workshops, and cooperative learning this is what is expected of a 21st century teacher.
4. The train by government social studies teachers with appropriate ICTs competencies is a prerequisite for effective use of ICTs in teaching social studies.

1.6 Conclusions

The effectively trained, informed, and skill-equipped social studies teacher is an asset to the effective implementation of the UBE. This is more realistic when the social studies teacher is knowledgeable about the objectives of UBE, which will be a benchmark for the teacher's instructional delivery guide in the classrooms. To achieve functional education, the leaner needs to be exposed to practical tasks and provided with ample opportunities to think reflectively, scientifically, and creatively. Teacher preparatory institutions like Nigerian universities, institutes of education, and colleges of education should constantly enrich, revise,

and review their programmes to include contemporary education reforms as UBE amongst others. This step will ultimately enhance social studies teachers' quality for effective implementation of UBE in junior secondary schools Cross River State and indeed in Nigeria.

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