

Social Studies Education: Recipe for the Integration of Nigerian Society

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ABSTRACT:

The main focus of this paper is the relevance of Social Studies in fostering integration among the multi-ethnic and religious divergent groups in Nigeria. It stresses the fact that Social Studies was established to create necessary awareness among the younger ones on the need for peaceful co-existence. Thus, effective Social Studies programme ensures the productions of effective citizens with worthwhile knowledge, skills and values which enable them contribute to the overall development of the nation. The paper concludes with recommendations among which are the production of quality education for the Nigerian citizens and creation of employment opportunities by the government to promote national integration.

INTRODUCTION:

It has been observed that socio-economic and political under-development in Nigeria is tied with ethnic, relation and cultural diversities which manifest in a negative behavioural pattern that is inimical to achieving a greater measure of unity amongst the various ethnic groups of Nigerian society. Nigeria, in is democratic governance cannot afford to be disintegrated so that it can benefit from the global economic process. Therefore, integration of Nigeria becomes inevitable in the scheme of its development struggle. The role of Social Studies education fostering national integration cannot be underestimated. This assertion is based on the premise that Social Studies education creates necessary awareness among the younger ones on the need for national integration and peaceful co-existence. Thus, the main aim of Social Studies in the Nigerian educational system is the production of efficient and effective citizens. In line with this, Okobiah in Tijani (2006) stresses that

An effective social studies education is meant to assist learners cultivate virtues that would transform them into effective citizens with skill, competences, attitudes, moral values and informed political judgment to effectively live, interact, interrelate of the contribute positively to the economic, social, political and cultural development of the Nigerian society.

The above exposition stresses the significance of the multi-disciplinary subject in molding the attitudes of Nigerian citizens for national integration and social reconstruction.

SOCIAL STUDIES: CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION:

Social Studies as a popular school subject is viewed as the study of man in relationship with those variables that makes up both physical and social environment. It is a course of study which deals with the influence of man on his social environment and how environmental factors influence to a greater extent, his decision making process. Dubey and Barth (1980) visualized Social Studies education as the investigation of human activities. Ololobu (1999) perceived this subject area as “an integrated study of man and his environment, both physical and social emphasizing on cognition, functional skills and desirable attitudes and actions for the purpose of producing and effective citizenry”. By and large, the main attraction of Social Studies centers on human behaviour. Thus, inculcate the right type of skills and virtues into the up-growing generation through a unified, integrated and multi disciplinary approach to creating enabling environment for

social advancement. Perhaps, it is the above critical function that makes the subject occupies a place of pride in the Nigerian educational structure.

SOCIAL STUDIES OBJECTIVES:

The general objectives of Social Studies as contained in the National curriculum (1987) focuses on the following:-

1. To develop capacity to learn basic skills including those of listening, reading, speaking, writing and Calculation together with those of observation, analysis and inference which are essentials to the formulation of sound judgment;
2. To ensure the acquisition of the relevant body of knowledge and information which is an essential perquisite to personal development and the making of positive contribution to the betterment of the society as a whole;
3. To create an awareness and understanding of our physical environment and the involving society and cultural processes;
4. To develop the ability for a national utilization of our cultural development;
5. Appreciate the diversity and inter-dependence of all members of the local and the national communities and the need for co-operation for the unity of the country and international understanding; and inculcate positive attitude and appropriate values of honesty, integrity, hardwork, fairness, justice and togetherness for the development of the nation.

It is pertinent to note at this juncture, that a number of objectives of Social Studies were formulated to meet the needs of different levels of the Nigerian educational system. However, at whatever level, the objectives represent the types of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values which Social Studies Education was established to achieve. Osunde (1989) opined that Social Studies objectives were developed to solve specific national problems which include promoting in the young ones, the spirit of patriotism and nationalism, exposing them to the problems in society and equipping them with the necessary skills needed for their survival.

SOCIAL STUDIES: A HISTORICAL PERCEPTION:

When compared with history, geography, sociology and other humanities, Social Studies can said to be relatively new in the curriculum not only in Nigeria but in a number of countries across the world. Its inclusion in the school curriculum in Nigeria was as a result of the larger curriculum reviews process which was aimed at making education socially relevant. Fafunwa (1974) in Tijani (2006) asserted that African Social Studies came into being and focuses on correcting the deficiencies inherent in the colonial type of education system which was designed only to meet the needs and aspirations of the colonial masters.

The development in the Social Studies Education is traceable to the USA, 1916 report of the Social Studies committee of the recognition of secondary education title the Social Studies in Secondary School Education. With the reports; Social Studies achieved a legitimate status as a curricular subject in schools. Its role has been expanded in education throughout many part of world. (Obi, 2008). In 1962, a conference was held at Durham Massachusetts, sponsored by the educational service incorporated with the objective of evolving new teaching of Social Studies Programme. In 1967, at a conference held in Queen's College of Oxford, England. Social Studies for Africa were discussed and was attended by a group of educationists from Africa. The same conference suggested the introduction of Social Studies in the primary schools and teacher training colleges of member countries. And British Educators attended the conference. The countries were Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra-Leone, Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia and Botswana. It was at this conference, that the African Social Studies Programme (ASSP) was planted with its headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya and was charged with the responsibility of encouraging the development as well as coordinating the programme in Africa. The Mombassa conference was a fellow up this conference. (Gambo, 1994). Obi (2008) stipulated that participant at the Oxford and Mombassa conferences generally agreed that, the teaching of History and geography needed a review to emphasize national heritage and national

achievement with the hope that these objectives would help to develop national pride and identify. Thus, the review paved way for Social Studies Curriculum.

NATIONAL INTEGRATION:

Integration in a multi-cultural entity like Nigeria remains core value for socio-political, economic and technological development. Integration is viewed as bringing people or objects together in such a way that they have sense of belonging to the same destiny. According to Okobiah (1984) in Obi (2008) integration is a state or condition of an organization or substance and interactive adjustment, the physiological, physical, emotional and mutual process with the environment. Such interactive process results in a state generally free from unrecognizable conflict and relievable strain. When applied to a nation, it means harmonious perceptions, personal adjustment of the individual to the standards, demands and responsibilities of the society of which he is a part and where he lives. Obi assessed that national integration is attitudinal in form and perceptual in content. it represents to some extent, the subjective dimension of national behaviour.

National integration is characterized by mutual understanding and commitment to socio-civic responsibilities for harmonious living with a view to achieve accelerated development. National integration involves learning other peoples' way of life and perceiving it as superior as one's cultural heritage. It nullifies any form of discrimination against cultural values of other people. Thus, the underlining principle of national integration is "genuine socio-cultural interdependency" which enhances inter-personal relation among the multi ethnic groups of the Nigerian society. Integration gives room for sharing of socio-cultural values and traits such as language, marriage, food mode of greeting, arts and crafts, festivals mode of dressing, e.t.c. in a nut shell, national integration embraces behavioural pattern that can ensure absolute security and rapid economic and political development.

GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TOWARDS NATIONAL INTEGRATION:

Nigerian government has made several attempts towards the realization of national integration based on the importance attached to it. Thus, it has put in place some programmes which serve as basic foundation for national unity. These are: The National Flag and Anthem, the Coat of Arms, the Nigerian Currency, the national constitution, establishment of unity/Federal schools, National youth service corps, the Nigerian armed forces and other security network. Nigerians are identified with the above features irrespective of ethnic and religious diversity. It has been realized that integration is critical to the overall development of the nation. This is based on the following benefits.

1. In the era of democratic governance, integration provides a platform for cultural stability and solidarity necessary for the emergence of viable and reliable leadership to put both natural and human resources to effective use.
2. It creates room for cross ventilation of traditional ideas, beliefs and values needed for harmonious living.
3. It facilitates social-economic activities across the nations which help to some extent, in poverty reduction in the Nigerian society.
4. It improves the socialization process of the Nigerian children and reduces the negative impression one holds about cultural values of other people.
5. It is fundamental to the realization of national security and political stability.

SOCIAL STUDIES: RECIPE FOR NATIONAL INTEGRATION:

Social Studies is an aspect of education which has human development in totality as its central focus. This pre-supposes that learning in this subject area goes beyond accumulation of facts, concepts, theories and generalization but, internalization and effective utilization of knowledge from other disciplines that could impact rapid development of the society. In this regard, the role of Social Studies in national integration is inestimable value. It inculcates acceptable social-political behaviours that are very essential to lay solid foundation for interpersonal relations and integration of ethically and culturally divergent Nigerian citizens.

Obi (2008) endorsed that, through Social Studies, social skills such as self-confident, power of imagination and resourcefulness, appreciation of the dignity of man, sense of respect and tolerance for others, willingness to accept necessary changes, attitudes and values favourable to social, political, cultural and economic development are learnt by the students. Similarly, Makinde (1980) believed that:

Social Studies programme would make the Nigeria's way of life known to all students. This awareness would help them become good citizens, who will be useful to themselves, to be community centered, rather than self-centered. It will encourage students to develop the spirit of self-sacrifice and self-reliance.

The rationale behind the teaching of Social Studies in schools is the creation of awareness about the idea of unity in diversity. Thus, it teaches inter-dependence which allows the individual learners to positively interact with people and share a sense of belonging to a common heritage and common destiny. Since integration is a requisite to national development, Obi (2008) stated that Social Studies as a multi-disciplinary subject aims at educating the citizenry to become nationalistic in outlook, patriotic in actions, self-dependent in living and broad-mindedness in thinking and perception.

The content of Social Studies is designed to provide the most vital knowledge the learners need to become socially relevant to contribute meaningfully to the achievement of national unity. According to Tijani (2006) Social Studies teaches what can be described as the most valuable wealth of information that would enable the attentive learners worthy of citizens of Nigeria as a blessed nation. In the same vein, Bozimo (2002) viewed the content of Social Studies as being:-

Wholesome, focusing on man in his social and physical environment, teaching the children how to become useful in the society, teaching how the younger generation can bring about the much needed national unity through the inculcation of desirable knowledge, skills and values of the society.

It is a known fact that national integration is largely dependent on effective citizenry, therefore, Social Studies inculcates into the students at all levels, worthwhile values which are fundamental in national integration. These are: Spirit of tolerance, truthfulness, co-operation, respect for constituted authorities and dignity of labour, self discipline, diligence and other democratic values like national consciousness, commitment to national duties and obligations such as voting during election, safe-guarding government properties, reporting criminal activities, effective participation in the promotion of social well-being, fairness, justice, among others.

Possession of abundant natural resources is valueless without harmonious living to harness and utilize the resources for the good of mankind. Therefore, Social Studies prepares the individual learners for peaceful and healthy living to contribute to the development of any community they find themselves in with this line of thought, Okam (2002) cautioned that "acquisition of the tenets of effective citizenship by students in our various schools setting should not be a chance affair in order to continue confronting the problems of Nigeria as a young democracy". Social Studies promotes attitudinal changes which enable the citizens to make positive contributions towards a united, strongly and self-reliant Nigerian society. However, for Social Studies to be used as effective instrument for national integration in Nigeria, the following threatening

PROBLEMS HAVE TO BE DEALT WITH:

1. Illiteracy: Education is a powerful means of welding together the cultural diversities of the nation. It changes one's perception about things believed and events. This there underscores the need to acquire quality education. Thus, the high levels of illiteracy among the masses does not create enabling environment for comprehension of the issues involved in national integration. That is why it is very common with the uneducated people to cause religious crisis and political disharmony.

2. Electoral fraud: This is a threatening factor to integration and national development. People want to be or remain in leadership positions at all cost, so, they go extra miles to sponsor electoral malpractices not minding the consequences on socio-political and economic development of the nation.
3. Multi-party system: One may argue that multi-party system is an ideal situation in a democratic governance. However, there is no way regional sentiments can be separated from the party formation in Nigeria. For instance, political parties formed by Northerners or Southerners automatically draw its supporters or wins sympathy from the area it was formed. This therefore, encourages tribalism and political disunity.
4. Religious Crisis: religion that is supposed to be factor of unification has been misunderstood by many people especially uneducated ones. This, apart from disintegrating Nigerian citizens, has led to massive destruction of lives and properties.
5. Unemployment: It is a known fact that graduates are produced on a yearly basis without employment opportunities provided for them by the governments. The inability of these graduates to secure employment constitute a major threat to national integration. This is based on the premise that most of them are used for political instability across the nation.

CONCLUSION:

From the foregoing deliberation, teaching of Social Studies in Nigerian schools is not by accident but a purposeful attempt aimed at correcting societal ills and preparing the citizens for useful adulthood. Social Studies helps in a great deal to make education socially functional and responsive to solve numerous obstacles in our collective development process which national integration fails. Therefore, teaching of this subject should be given ultimate attention it deserves in the Nigerian educational system so that the distinctive values embedded in it can be used for the advancement of the nation.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Based on the discussion so far, the following recommendations are made:

1. Quality education should be provided by the government to liberate the minds of the Nigerian citizens towards social reconstruction.
2. Condition of service of teachers especially at the primary and secondary levels should be improved. This is because quality education cannot be achieved without teachers' satisfaction and high level of commitment of duties.
3. Government should create employment opportunities for the school graduates to engage them in productive ventures. This would enable them live a fruitful lives and contribute to the development of Nigerian society.
4. Social Studies Education should made a compulsory subject in the institution of higher learning because of its social relevance.

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