
**VISION FOR A NEW SOCIAL STUDIES: USING THE
APPROPRIATE LENSES**

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Abstract

The need for Social Studies to continue to keep pace with the changes as well as national and global developments resulting from the dynamic nature of our society, calls for a review of the subject's present focus, content areas, method of content delivery and choice of instructional resource materials. This is aimed at determining whether the way the subject is being presently handled in our classrooms can actually assist in getting the learners to keep up with the set pace. An attempt was made to do a quick review of contemporary Social Studies purposely to determine whether there is anything wrong with it in relation to the national and global events and development. The result of the review demanded a clear vision for new Social Studies, and the possible challenges that might be faced while driving the vision are highlighted. The appropriate lenses needed for transforming the vision into reality and assisting in the promotion of a discipline that is more relevant to societal aspirations and needs were highlighted and discussed.

Keywords: Lenses, National development, Social Studies, Vision.

Introduction

Social Studies as a discipline has been firmly entrenched in the curricula of Nigeria's educational system. As a subject, it is now offered across all the educational levels; basic, post-basic and tertiary. However, recent national and global developments and events across the world cannot but demand a critical appraisal of the subject Social Studies as a problem-solving discipline. This is in terms of its focus, the content areas, the method of content delivery and the choice of instructional resource materials. This position is also informed by the dynamic nature of society with its attendant problems that keep surfacing from time to time and the need for such problems to be regularly attended to. In order to be relevant to the needs and aspirations of society, Social Studies must therefore continue to keep pace with the changes as well as the national and global developments in the society.

Some of these national and global events and developments have surfaced in various forms and shapes, and we cannot rule out the fact that any attempt to jettison the consideration of their implications on what is taught in Social Studies and how it is taught could constrain the realization of the set goals and objectives of the subject across all the levels of our educational system. Typical examples of these national and global events and developments are known to include technological advancement, experiences related to global pandemic, societal socio-economic advancements, the unimaginable spate of insecurity across all the regions of Nigeria and the crave for materialism among the Nigerian youth.

The fact that the discipline is basically concerned with acquiring the knowledge, values, attitudes and skills required for building a better life for people and coping with changes or alterations in the environment, implies that its focus must regularly be in tandem with understanding and resolution of issues emanating from these national and global events and developments. Thus, the focus of this paper is calling for a clear vision for new Social Studies using appropriate lenses that can help promote a discipline that is more relevant to societal aspirations and needs.

To achieve this, the paper therefore, attempts a quick review of contemporary Social Studies purposely to determine whether there is anything wrong with it in relation to the national and global events and developments. This is with the ultimate goal of determining if there is that need for a new Social Studies. As a follow-up, consideration is given for a vision for such new Social Studies, and the possible challenges that might be faced while driving the vision are highlighted. The needed lenses for transforming the vision into reality are then discussed.

The Contemporary Social Studies in Nigeria: Anything Wrong with it?

Social Studies as a discipline is concerned with the study of human interactions with their environment using tools like knowledge, values, attitudes and skills to better understand and attempt the resolution of problems emanating from such interactions (Lawal, 2018). The NCSS (2016) remarked that the primary purpose of Social Studies “is to help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world.” The discipline deals with human behaviour, relationships, resources and institutions. Unlike in other parts of the world where Social Studies has undergone a lot of transformations to address contemporary problems, Social Studies in Nigeria is currently not offered either as a core or elective subject at the Senior Secondary level. Even at the Basic level it is offered as a unit under Religion and National values subject. To this extent, the subject’s relevance is misunderstood and reduced in power to function effectively as championed by the core social science and humanities specialists.

A cursory review of the curriculum content and instructional delivery strategies in Social Studies education today reflects a reminiscent of teaching purely for knowledge regurgitation with less effort being made by the practicing teachers to promote values clarification and positive attitudes even when the curricula have been so structured to emphasise this. This in spite of the nature of the subject which presents it as an issue-based school subject

designed and introduced as an innovative and value-oriented discipline with the goal of producing honest, committed, knowledgeable, patriotic and diligent citizens (Idowu, 2017).

Okam (2005) while confirming the current situation in Social Studies classrooms revealed that “the young learners are being fed with the traditional content of approach which educates the learners out of context in relationship to the environment in which to function as citizens. He went on to conclude that “classroom Social Studies implementation (teaching and learning) of issues have not been sufficiently used to ‘Nigerianise’ the young learners to become effective, informed and productive citizens within the Nigerian context, and empirical studies reflected that the ‘pedagogy’ being employed in the teaching of Social Studies is faulty” (Okam, 2005).

This is evident in the classrooms as practising Social Studies teachers now teach the subject with little or no consciousness to promote citizenship reforms and transformation in the learners, forgetting that citizenship development is the pivot of any meaningful Social Studies education (Heafner, 2008). The subject as handled by both preservice and in-service teachers no longer seem to teach the subject to educate and nurture in learners citizenship; cultural awareness and perspective awareness; encouragement of compassion and empathy for the powerless; promotion of justice, tolerance, and democratic ideals; as well as the development of an understanding of the borderless communities among workers, businesses, citizens, governments, individuals, and society.

The inference that could be drawn from this discourse is that “while Nigeria appreciates the need for an issue-based Social Studies curriculum for its relevance in the 21st century schools, the expectation placed on the subject has not been achieved due to certain problems which are currently being faced by the subject. This is particularly in the areas of content development, teacher competence/qualifications, choice and variation of instructional delivery strategies, and resource utilization that is technically compliant. The discussion in this section of the paper undoubtedly reflects that something is fundamentally wrong with contemporary Social Studies and therefore needs to be given some attention if the subject must continue to serve its initial set goals and continually

respond to the dynamic nature of the society where it is being taught as a school subject.

The Need for a New Social Studies

The preceding paragraphs and the current wave in human society therefore call for an urgent need for a review of the way Social Studies is being currently taught and dispensed to the target audiences in our educational system. More so, that there is now a spate of digital applications and dimensions that need to be integrated into the teaching and learning of the subject. This is in addition to the need to prepare the learners in the discipline as it is taught today with the knowledge, values, attitudes and skills required for coping with the ugly trends that are striving to rear their heads against a worthwhile future in the Nigerian society. This is with the ultimate desire to uplift, and improve the subject in what Mestiola, Naquita and Tantengco (2018) called more innovative and more specialized discipline that can meet the 21st century's intellectual challenges capable of helping to capitulate and address. social issues and problems.

Furthermore, the issue of insecurity that is presently querying the existence of a united Nigeria demands for a new Social Studies; a discipline that can help stimulate the required awareness, values and positive disposition to the management of our cultural diversity as a nation. There are reported cases of banditry, kidnapping, gruesome killings and terrorism across all the geo-political regions of Nigeria today and one is not sure of any abatement in site. Likewise, the rate of corruption, nepotism and negative values particularly as they relate to materialism thoughts and practices among the growing youth is increasing with little or no intervention at either the community or government level.

The observed policy somersault in the curriculum development and teacher preparation also calls for a new Social Studies. Restricting the curriculum content building of Social Studies to a component in Religion and National Values with very limited number of topics for learners to interact with, implies that they are not likely to have a good grasp of the knowledge and skills required

for contributing and engaging positively in any discourse relating to democratic living. This is because, the existing curriculum has limited their exposure through the few topics and issues they are being taught as Social Studies. These might not be enough to promote citizens' responsibilities and values.

There is also the need to align the content, instructional strategies and resource materials with contemporary issues and best practices. For instance, with the coming of COVID-19, there is need to prepare the Social Studies teacher with how to teach in a pandemic era. This is in terms of the how, what and when to teach the subject using the required skills. There is therefore that need for a shift in the teaching and learning paradigm of the subject if we truly believe that the subject is a problem solving one. Hence, we are talking of a vision for a new Social Studies.

The Vision for a New Social Studies

A discourse on the vision for a new Social Studies demands a clear cut explanation of what the concept itself entails. Kadiri (2020) conceptualized vision as mental perception, aim idea or a new and desirable future reality. It is a process of direction setting. According to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2014) vision is the knowledge and imagination that are needed in planning for the future with a clear purpose. The implication of these definitions to the new Social Studies we are calling for is that the stakeholders in the discipline need to begin to think of how to better exploit the flexibility of the discipline to make it accommodate the contemporary issues and developments earlier highlighted in the preceding paragraphs so that the true and real nature of Social Studies as a problem solving discipline can be better reflected during any teaching and learning interaction. This position is further buttressed by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS, 2008) – a professional association, while reflecting on a vision of powerful teaching and learning in Social Studies. The NCSS emphasised that the vision of Social Studies should promote a learning that leads to a well -informed and civic-minded citizenry that is capable of building on and sustaining democratic traditions.

The vision for the new Social Studies should therefore be one that encourages the engagement of learner in a comprehensive process of contributing multiple dilemmas, speculations, critical thinking so that they can regularly make personal and civic decisions based on information from multiple perspectives. It should be a vision that will influence the evolution of a Social Studies Curriculum that provides strategies and activities that engage learners with significant ideas, and encourage them to connect what they are learning to their prior knowledge and to current issues. The vision should stimulate in the learners, critical and creative thinking about what is being learnt so that they can apply such learning to authentic situations.

In summary, the vision of the new Social Studies should be that which can prepare the learners to “identify, understand and work towards solving the challenges facing our diverse nation in an increasingly interdependent world. It should be one that prepares them to be more competent handlers of contemporary social problems, and responsible citizens throughout their lives. The vision should therefore, essentially be that which encourages the learners to pass a teaching and learning experience that makes them informed and civically engaged citizens who are ready to impact their society for the betterment of humanity and actively participate in democratic endeavours. This is with the ultimate goal of getting the learners to be responsive and thoughtful so that they can be more active politically, socially and morally in their communities and the nation at large.

Possible Challenges in Driving the Vision

There is no doubt that the vision for a new Social Studies demands a great shift in the way stakeholders perceive and handles the discipline during teaching and learning. However, it is important to highlight some of the possible challenges that can constrain the driving of this vision. Specifically, the current teacher preparation strategies and teachers’ professional competence in relation to the expectations of the vision of a new Social Studies is a major challenge. This is because the teacher trainers themselves and even

the superintending agencies may not be immediately available or ready to factor the demands of the vision of a new Social Studies into their minimum standards or benchmarks of academic standards, probably because of the complications relating to the fulfilment of the due process or protocol involved in curriculum review.

There is also the challenge of slow response velocity to change in our society, and the case of the practising Social Studies teachers is not excluded. Past experiences of people's reaction to change have not been that of a smooth and soothing transition. This is probably because the time lag before the receivers of change recognise that the change needs to be embraced can be longer due to hysteresis (the lag between cause and effect) in change of opinion and practices. Hence, they are likely to express reactions to abruptness in change and would want to also react with late shifts in response to such a new idea, particularly as it relates to the vision of the new Social Studies.

Furthermore, the challenge of globalization which is characterised by advancement in science and technology has further bridged the distance of nations and states with a resultant effect on the type and quality of information and images (right or wrong) available for sharing among learners. The implication of this to the vision of the new Social Studies is that practicing teachers would be faced with the task of sourcing for relevant strategies that will help keep the learners in shape for regular response to the social problems that would normally accompany this technological advancement.

Effective implementation of the demands of the new Social Studies requires the recognition of the key role which technology will play. However, Mohammed Imam (2016) is still cautious of a challenge capable of creating a precarious experience for the practising teacher of the subject. Specifically, he is of the opinion that there could be limitations in the area of availability of technological resources, particularly in terms of inadequate software and limited funds to procure them, limited content coverage and teachers' self-confidence especially when it comes to the use of technology to teach. These challenges have implications for the

successful realization of the vision of the new Social Studies. Considering these implications and providing for strategies for addressing them through the exploration and application of specific lenses for driving this vision will therefore promote new Social Studies that can assure the production of a support system that is capable of facilitating the 21st century Social Studies outcomes for today's learners and students.

Transforming the Vision into Reality: The Needed Lenses

A person or organization's vision gives clarity around the outcomes of the anticipated transformation and sets out the key themes/tools of how the organisation or person will operate for success. Hence, in order to effectively transform the vision of the new Social Studies into reality, it is therefore important for teachers to be mindful of the need to teach the subject in a way that aspects of daily life are integrated into the teaching and learning experiences and make every moment a teachable moment. In the context of this paper, the tools required for the expected transformation of the vision of the new Social Studies to reality are the lenses. That is a channel through which the new Social Studies can be seen, embraced and understood.

Bearing in mind the characteristic features of the new Social Studies being discussed, one would want to suggest some lenses and give an appropriate guide on how such lenses can be used to drive the vision in focus. For example, the need to cultivate the required teacher competencies to respond to the contemporary social issues/problems and the possible challenges that can constrain the realization of the vision of the new Social Studies requires the development of an integrated curriculum with the goal of helping "learners synthesize discrete information and to connect such knowledge to the needs of everyday living" (Mathison and Freeman, 1997). This will be through detailed content analysis of the current Social Studies component of the Religious and National Values curriculum and it should involve the consideration of the criteria of validity, relevance to life, variety, cumulation, and multiple-learning.

This is to the extent that what seems highly relevant in the past, would not necessarily be so today, and what seems relevant today may not be in the nearest future. Thus, as well advised by Awoyemi (1987) and re-echoed by Adetoro (2015), what is needed is to adjust to the thought patterns of the learners, their attitudes and beliefs, interests and values as well as the type of society that exists and the predominant human trend in it to aid and enrich content selection for the new Social Studies. One is therefore, calling for content enrichment of the present Social Studies curricula at levels, with a particular focus on the subject's component in the Religion and National Values curriculum; a disarticulation and content expansion will serve a better purpose for the new Social Studies.

Deliberate incorporation of technology into the teaching of Social Studies will help transform the vision into reality. It is a lens that has the power to become a dynamic and forceful agent for changing the Social Studies curriculum (Imam, 2016). This was confirmed by the National Council for Social Studies (NCSS, 2013) where it observed that “civil society lives are supported by technology-driven and technology-oriented interventions and have a major influence on learners' beliefs, knowledge, daily life, social and cultural changes, and on people's ways of interaction with the world”.

The integration of technology into the Social Studies curriculum and instructional delivery would thus need to be taken as a shared commitment within the worldwide community of Social Studies and would need to be embraced as the “touch-stone in a number of researches capable of promoting the realization of the vision of the new Social Studies as well as making learning more enjoyable, meaningful, authentic and empowering the learners to gain 21st century skills for identifying and solving societal problems. The skills to look out for as part of the lenses for driving the vision will include among others, multi-disciplinary awareness, information gathering and analysis, communication, inquiry and critical thinking, data analysis and prudent use of 21st century media and technology. Teaching the new Social Studies to acquire these skills will help the learners thrive in a world of continuous and accelerating change.

Again, an improvement in teachers' competencies and skills of selective technology for teaching and learning based on the vision of the new Social Studies is another lens and useful transformation tool. For instance, where the teacher acquires a personal laptop computer as his/her activity centre and exploits such for the integrative teaching of important issues and problems like globalization, insecurity, peace, global pandemic, democracy and multicultural education, he or she can be identified as a change agent contributing to the realization of the vision of the new Social Studies.

These teachers' competencies could also be assessed by the level of their manipulation of what Imam (2016) tagged generalist technologies (that is, the common ones that do not require any special skills to use, e.g. e-mail, SMART boards, video iPod, web-based decision tools and other online learning resources), and specialist technologies (those that require special skills and are software that have not been explicitly designed for use in the Social Studies classrooms, e.g. online games, digital media etc.). How constructive the learning in the classroom is with the use of any or a combination of some of these technologies therefore becomes a useful lens. The NCSS (2015) prescribes some standards that can enhance the Social Studies teacher's competencies and drive better the realization of the vision in focus. These are:

Content Knowledge

Demonstration of knowledge of Social Studies disciplines. That is, being knowledgeable of disciplinary concepts, facts, and tools; structures of inquiry; and forms of representation; Application of Content through Planning: ability to plan learning sequences that draw upon Social Studies knowledge and literacies to support the civic competence of learners; Design and Implementation of Instruction and Assessment: ability to design and implement instruction and authentic assessments for Social Studies that promote learning and competence in civic life; Social Studies Learners and Learning: ability to plan and implement relevant and responsive pedagogy, create collaborative and interdisciplinary learning environments, and prepare learners to be informed

advocates for an inclusive and equitable society; and Professional Responsibility and Informed Action: ability to reflect and expand upon their Social Studies knowledge, inquiry skills, and civic dispositions needed to adapt practice, promote social justice, and take informed action in schools and/or communities.

Another lens that can be used to view and assess the transformation of the vision into reality is the level of active learning taking place in the classroom where the new Social Studies is being taught and hands-on activities, cooperative learning, peer assessment and values clarification are vividly evident. Such learning must also be that which echoes values throughout all parts of the teaching of Social Studies. The teacher in this case, must be ready to evolve a purposeful Social Studies which is characterised by qualities like value-based and challenging teaching.

Involving the practising Social Studies teachers in the design and implementation of the new curriculum to be derived from the vision of the new Social Studies is also one of the needed lenses. This is very germane right from conception through delivery. The existence of inclusive learning that emphasises continuity in learning where students could connect, relate or compare their experiences to the lessons they are discussing (Mesttiola, Naquita & Tantengco, 2018), can equally be a reflection of possible delivery of the new Social Studies.

Furthermore, the lenses should check the level of learners' engagement in experiences that can help them develop fair-mindedness and encourage recognition and serious consideration of opposing points of view while not forgetting the need to respect well-supported positions. Likewise, it should check whether the subject teaching is promoting sensitivity to cultural similarities and differences as well as commitment to individual and social responsibilities.

In situations where the Social Studies practitioners are able to provide positive answers to the following questions, such answers can equally serve as part of the needed lenses driving the vision of the new Social Studies. These questions include: Does the content of the curriculum of the new Social Studies address the totality of human experience, connect with the past, link to the present and

look ahead to the future?; Does the teaching of the new Social Studies and the classroom practice teach the learners how to learn in a way that makes them discover by themselves, respect evidence and be able to make decision in the light of evidence, that is inquiry approach?; Do the contents and instructional delivery strategies encourage the building of critical thinking, problem solving and participatory skills needed to become engaged citizens?; and Does the teaching and learning of Social Studies reflect the possible development of active and responsible learners who can identify and analyse public problems, deliberate with others on how to address the problems and take constructive actions together? The attainment of the vision of the new Social Studies being presented in this paper can further be assessed by determining how well informed and reflective the teachers are in the implementation of the curriculum and the learners' ability to reflect a balance between retrieval and recitation of content and a thoughtful examination of concepts in order to provide intellectual challenges.

Conclusion

The discourse in this presentation has created opportunity for an examination of the contemporary practices in the subject of Social Studies. The result of this revealed that the vision, focus, content and instructional delivery approach being employed by the teachers of Social Studies do not seem to be mindful of the demands of the 21st century and the prevailing social problems and issues. The implication of this is that the non-consideration of a review of the vision, content and focus of the subject can limit the students' creativity, imagination, cooperation and social skills.

Suggestions

Based on the conclusion, it will therefore not be out of place to suggest that the vision of the anticipated new Social Studies would be better attained when the practitioners look out for how meaningful, integrative, value-based, challenging and active the teaching and learning of the subject is. There will also be that very important consideration of addressing the apparent current

marginalization of the subject, which reduced the content of Social Studies to a theme under Religion and National Values while offering of the subject at the senior secondary level as an examinable subject has been removed from the national curriculum. Digital teaching and blended learning skills will have to be acquired by the Social Studies teachers while also embracing integration of teaching.

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