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**SERVICE-LEARNING: AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT OF  
SOCIAL STUDIES FOR A NEW WORLD**

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**Abstract**

*Service learning is a well-articulated teaching and learning technique that blends technical and scientific knowledge with personal, social, and communal growth. This method promotes interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, critical thinking, and problem-solving, as well as fostering a sense of self-esteem, competence, and social responsibility. The aim of service learning is to connect students to meaningful service in the school and community and to promote civic competency. Service learning is not only relevant to the field of Social Studies, but it is also being explored in various other fields such as economics, management, psychology, sociology, and education. Research has shown that students who are engaged in service learning are more motivated and committed to addressing social challenges. Despite its potential, the teaching of Social Studies in Nigeria often lacks practical application, making it difficult for students to see the relevance of what they learn. This paper argues that service learning should be infused into the Social Studies curriculum for a more inclusive and saner world.*

**Keywords:** Service-learning, Social responsibility, Social Studies, Values, School.

## **Introduction**

Over the past years, there has seemed to be a growing interest in conducting research to discover the best pedagogical practices in educating youths about their immediate society. However, service learning is a well-articulated, regular, and coordinated instructional method. It employs unique presumptions and combines the evolution of the individual, the community, and science with the gain of technological and scientific knowledge. With the help of this method, students may acquire interdisciplinary work and creative flexibility while producing transcendental, personal, social, and emotional knowledge. Thus, the main goals of Social Studies are promoted through this process, which also fosters interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships, communication, networking and collaborative work, leadership, negotiation, and collaboration, as well as personal effectiveness, self-knowledge, self-esteem, and self-motivation. Additionally, it teaches students about social responsibility, community living, and humanitarian issues. Additionally, students learn how to create original responses to societal issues. Students gain reading skills, a higher feeling of self-worth, and critical thinking and problem-solving abilities through service-learning activities.

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) defines Social Studies as the study of the humanities and social sciences to promote civic competence. The main objective of Social Studies is to support young people in acquiring the capacity to make informed decisions for the greater good as citizens of a democratic society that is culturally diverse in today's worldwide culture. Therefore, based on this and Akpochafo's (2022) analysis, Nigeria is richly endowed and has no business being a poor nation, much less the World Poverty Capital. She lacks the appropriate constitutional provisions, appropriate policies, and appropriate young attitudes. As a result, service learning, a kind of experiential learning, may be used as a means of bringing together young people who are engaged in meaningful community and school service.

Service learning should be seen as a crucial element of Social Studies for a new world (Orlando & Carlos, 2019). They stated that

when it comes to developing soft skills that are cross-critical to function, time, and society, service learning is a pedagogical technique that sets additional goals and goes beyond the particular frontier. They also noted that it emphasizes sustainable development and makes an effort to identify, comprehend, and settle social disputes that influence the neighborhood. It acts as an outstanding multiplier of tacit knowledge and is a dynamic and participative technique for applying scientific knowledge to problems of student development and community development.

Service learning is a pedagogy of global importance that has to be spread and used in all fields of study (Moorer & Christian, 2009). According to Lawler and Joseph (2009), graduate-level trans-disciplinary courses, especially those in the humanities, are a good fit for service learning as a mode of instruction. The application of service learning is, however, being broadened and investigated in several disciplines, including Economics, Management, Business, Finance, Engineering, Psychology, Mathematics, Accounting, Nursing, Sociology, Political Science, Education, Geography, Social Studies, Communications, and Computer Technologies. A pedagogical paradigm called service learning looks at education through the prism of experience. It has been utilized by several colleges throughout the world in a variety of subjects, programs, and educational levels (Yorio & Ye, 2012). It enhances people's skills and civic responsibilities while allowing educational practices and community service to coexist (Andrews, 2007). It takes on different forms of personal and social enrichment throughout the learning and teaching processes, such as civic responsibility, social cohesion, community development, and a sense of happiness, and it acts as an active molecule within the community. It manifests itself in the art of teaching the interaction between the University, the community, and the student.

Furthermore, it promotes students to become more active, positive, and cooperative members of society (Billig, 2000). The notion of service learning may be used in education, as a method of instruction, or as a tool for promoting inclusiveness in the classroom. As a consequence of its implementation, institutions will undergo structural changes. Partnerships between the productive market,

the education market, and the behavior and participation of stakeholders, including the civil society as a whole, will also result. It is an effective learning strategy to involve the community, the school, and the student in an interactive learning process (Tiger & Parker, 2011). Therefore, including service learning into the Social Studies curriculum will be an excellent method for creating a more inclusive and sane society because of all the positive traits it fosters.

Additionally, service-learning is a kind of education that gives students autonomy and control over their learning process while simultaneously promoting the consolidation of learning via reflective self-examination (Petkus, 2000; Dunlap, 2006). As well, it promotes the student's perception of competence, self-efficacy, strengthened social bonds, and stable relationships (Billig, 2010), as well as their sense of work satisfaction. It not only makes knowledge more accessible, but it also involves the community and students in a process of reciprocal trans-disciplinary development (Al-Rashid & Walker, 2004; Kenworthy-U-Ren & Peterson, 2005; Mpofu, 2007; Conway, Amel & Gerwien, 2009, Tiger & Parker, 2011). According to Wang and Rodgers (2006), it promotes social justice, combats poverty, commits students with fairness, and creates social capital (Laura, 2014). However, studies and programme reviews have demonstrated that students who participate in service learning become more motivated and dedicated to solving the root causes of social problems as a result of the skills they have developed over time.

The teaching of Social Studies in Nigeria is often restricted to theoretical ideas with little emphasis on practical application, which makes it challenging for students to see the relevance of what they are learning. This, combined with frequently out-of-date curricula that do not reflect the needs of the society at large, results in students being taught information that is irrelevant in the twenty-first century. Service learning should thus be a crucial component of Social Studies for a new world since it is a pedagogy that may enhance students' academic, professional learning, and elevated civic-minded ideals. Although scholars have made an attempt to promote Social Studies teaching and learning by concentrating on how to address the challenges, effective implementation of the Social Studies curriculum

among others with little focus on how to incorporate the act of experiential learning into the teaching and learning of Social Studies through service learning, hence, need for this paper. This paper thereby addresses service learning as an essential element of Social Studies for a new world.

### **Benefits of Service-Learning in Teaching Social Studies**

Service learning is an effective pedagogical approach that focuses on the integration of service activities into the curriculum to promote students' academic, personal, and civic growth. It offers multiple benefits to students, including the fostering of civic engagement by teaching them about their civic responsibilities and encouraging them to get involved in their communities. Service learning also helps students develop critical thinking skills by challenging them to think critically about the issues they are addressing and the impact of their actions. Additionally, this approach provides opportunities for students to build character and develop important traits such as empathy, compassion, and leadership. Service-learning projects often involve working with diverse groups of people, which can help students enhance their cultural awareness and gain a better understanding of different cultures and perspectives. Service learning also fosters personal growth by helping students build self-esteem, confidence, and a sense of purpose as they work to make a positive impact in their communities. Furthermore, it encourages experiential learning by providing students with hands-on, real-world experiences that bring the concepts and theories taught in Social Studies to life. Also, service learning plays a role in building community ties by encouraging cooperation on service projects among students, educators, and community members, thus fostering deeper bonds and a sense of shared purpose.

To corroborate the opinion of previous researchers on the benefits of service learning, it was acknowledged that one of the most effective approaches is the service-learning pedagogy. It places a strong emphasis on programs that can assist locals as well as students' commitment to the betterment of society as a whole, or to "doing good" (Aslanargun, 2012). Service learning is a method of

teaching and learning that enables students to grasp a certain curriculum by helping members of the community. To increase learning, foster civic responsibility, and strengthen communities, service-learning integrates coursework with good community service initiatives (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2012). By fostering student reflection on their experiences, critical thinking about how those experiences relate to the course, and problem-solving, service-learning enhances the educational value of the courses to which it is attached (Lemieux & Allen, 2007). In courses with service-learning requirements, the development of cooperative and respectful relationships between students and community members is given equal priority to course content and service activities that address community needs (Harkavy, 2004).

### **Bottom of Form**

Gbadamosi (2022) also acknowledged that service learning is a framework for experiential learning that integrates theory and practice by allowing students to participate in a service that addresses community needs before reflecting on the experience in class to better understand the course material (Resch & Schrittester, 2019; Kurt, 2020). Additionally, service learning as an experiential learning tool can get students involved in worthwhile community service activities and reflect on the work completed to strengthen their sense of personal principles and civic responsibility, enhance their comprehension of academic content, and broaden their horizons of specialization (Gbadamosi, 2018a; Olagoke-Oladokun *et al*, 2020).

According to the Institute for Learning and Teaching at Colorado State University provided the following list of advantages of service-learning, which was adapted from the California State University (CSU) service-learning faculty manual, fourth edition, service-learning is seen a highly impactful technique that has a substantial influence on student achievement. It offers a range of benefits to students, including the practical application of information and skills, which makes academic knowledge and skills more applicable. Service-learning also accommodates for different learning styles

and provides opportunities for interaction with people from different cultures and lifestyles. Through this approach, students can experience an increase in self-efficacy, analytical skills, and social development. It also provides opportunities for meaningful community involvement and an increase in civic responsibility, thus making academic content more relevant to real-life situations. Service-learning has been described as a way of “bringing books to life and life to books”. Service-learning also benefits students in a positive way by promoting personal and social growth, reducing stereotypes and promoting cultural and ethnic understanding, developing leadership and communication abilities, instilling a sense of civic duty and citizenship skills, promoting dedication to service, academic progress, and career advancement. Service-learning provides students with the capacity to put what they have learned into practice in “the real world”, while fostering positive ties with faculty members who participate in service-learning initiatives. It also contributes to physical well-being. Service-learning assists students in becoming ready for the workforce by providing hands-on experiences that businesses generally favour in higher education. It prepares students for real-world circumstances by focusing on the potential to apply knowledge and skills to real-world circumstances. The community also benefits from service-learning initiatives, with reports of improved links with universities. This approach provides opportunities for students to make a positive impact in their communities, contributing to a more connected and supportive community as a whole.

In summary, service-learning is an effective tool for improving Social Studies education in Nigeria. It provides students with hands-on experiences, develops critical thinking, empathy, leadership, and civic engagement, and fosters personal and professional growth. The benefits of service-learning align with the goals of the Nigerian education system and should be incorporated into the Social Studies curriculum. Service-learning promotes student engagement, tackles poverty and promotes social justice, and involves the student, school, and community in an interactive learning process. This pedagogy has been successfully used in various universities worldwide and is a promising strategy for enhancing Social Studies education in Nigeria.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study highlights the benefits of incorporating service-learning into the teaching of Social Studies in Nigeria. Service-learning is a pedagogy that combines coursework with community service projects, thereby providing students with hands-on, real-world experiences that bring the concepts taught in Social Studies to life. This approach not only helps students develop critical thinking skills, empathy, compassion, and leadership, but also promotes civic engagement, cultural awareness, and personal growth. The literature review supports the idea that service learning is a powerful tool for enhancing the educational value of courses, improving students' civic responsibility, and promoting their academic, professional, and personal growth. As service learning is a well-articulated, consistent, and coordinated teaching-learning technique that has been found to be effective in fostering civic competency and personal growth. The technique is being widely explored in various fields and has been used successfully in various universities around the world. It is a process that encourages students to be more engaged, constructive, and cooperative members of society, and it also fosters self-esteem, personal development, and social responsibility. It has been acknowledged by Gbadamosi (2022) that service learning has been found to be a good learning technique that incorporates the student, the school, and the community in an interactive learning process. Furthermore, it fosters social justice, tackles poverty, and builds social capital. This pedagogy should be infused into the Social Studies curriculum in Nigeria to provide students with a more well-rounded education and a deeper understanding of the world around them. Additionally, the benefits of service-learning are consistent with the goals of the Nigerian education system, making it a promising strategy and essential element for the improvement of Social Studies education in the country for a new and saner world.

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