

**EXPLORING THE EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL STUDIES IN
NIGERIA: UNRAVELING THE PAST, UNDERSTANDING
THE PRESENT, AND ENVISIONING THE FUTURE**

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Abstract

This paper presents a discussion on the history of Social Studies in Nigeria, its current state and envisages the future of the discipline. Social Studies is a multidisciplinary field that plays an important role in developing in Nigerian citizens an understanding of their society as well as the knowledge, values and skills that would enable them to live effectively and manage the problems they may encounter in their day to day life, and learn how to live peacefully with others in the society. The attainment of the objectives of Social Studies Education in Nigerian Schools has been subject to debate due to rising levels of moral decadence and perilous societal vices. The paper intends to influence policy and practice in Social Studies education by identifying strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement. It envisions a future in which Social Studies is prioritized for its role in developing active citizens, promoting social justice, and addressing new challenges via the integration of technology, local and global views, and the development of critical thinking and problem-solving abilities.

Keywords: Social Studies, Education, Past, Curriculum, Challenges, Future.

Introduction

The goal of introducing Social Studies in Nigerian schools was to provide pupils a well-rounded education while fostering civic engagement, critical thinking, and a sense of national unity. Since then, Social Studies has grown to be a crucial component of the national curriculum, supporting social development and civic education objectives. Social Studies is a multidisciplinary field that includes several subjects in the humanities and social sciences. It is a required course from primary school through junior secondary school that inculcates in learners relevant knowledge, skills, and values they require to engage in society. In order to achieve civic competency, Social Studies curriculum promotes the formation of values and knowledgeable viewpoints (Larson, 2017).

Over the years, Social Studies in Nigeria has witnessed substantial modifications in its content, instructional approaches and curriculum design. The discipline has evolved to address emerging social issues in the Nigerian society and globally. However, despite its potential, Social Studies education in Nigeria faces various challenges, including limited resources, inadequate training for educators, and the need for continuous curriculum updates to address contemporary issues. To a large extent, this attests to the seeming failure of Social Studies to contribute meaningfully to the Nigerian dream (Ogunyemi, 2010).

The introduction of Social Studies in Nigeria like in many other countries was characterized by the desire to use the subject to address contemporary national problems (Lawal, nd) and the need to produce honest, committed, knowledgeable, patriotic and diligent citizens which was the ground for introducing an innovative and value-oriented Social Studies in the 1960s and 1970s has remained a forlorn hope, if not a wishful thinking in Nigeria. Understanding the historical trajectory therefore as well as its current state and prospects in Nigeria is crucial for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders involved in educational reforms and curriculum development. By reflecting on the past, stakeholders can have an understanding of the factors that influences the growth of Social Studies education and learn from previous experiences. Assessing

the present state helps identify the success, failures, and areas that needs improvement, thereby allowing policymakers and educators to make informed decisions. Envisioning the future creates room for planning, ensuring that Social Studies stays relevant, responsive, and successful in meeting the demands of Nigerian society. Ultimately, the objective is to cultivate an informed, engaged, and active citizenry capable of contributing to Nigeria's growth and prosperity. To this end, this study attempts to examine Social Studies in Nigeria: Past, present, and future.

Social Studies Development in Nigeria

The historical development of Social Studies in Nigeria dates back to the post-colonial period following the nation's independence in 1960. Nigeria's educational system underwent substantial reorganization and modifications during this time in an effort to encourage students' critical thinking, civic engagement, and sense of national harmony. The ideas and concepts of Social Studies were influenced by educational philosophies from Western countries, particularly the United States where it was first introduced into the school curriculum for social and civic education.

The advancement of Social Studies in Nigeria showcased the influence of American education on the Nigerian system. Early works in Social Studies in Nigeria, similar to America, relied on materials from history, geography, and the social sciences. However, the concept of integrated Social Studies gained acceptance in Africa through the African Social Studies Programme (ASSP) in 1968. African teachers recognized that the traditional Social Studies subjects inherited from colonial masters alienated African children from their environment and society. In response, Nigeria initiated comprehensive education reforms in 1969 (Adaralegbe in Udoukpong & Okon, 2012).

During the colonial era (1840-1960), Social Studies as an integrated subject did not exist in Nigeria. Instead, primary and post-primary schools taught a curriculum called "General Knowledge" (Udoh in Lawal, nd), which disconnected Nigerian students from their environment, society, and culture. The

development of Social Studies in Nigeria preceded that of other countries in Africa. As early as 1958, the Ohio State University sponsored Nigerians for Social Studies training programs, aiming to upgrade primary school teachers. Between 1956 and 1963, the Ohio project was implemented in Western Nigeria, targeting intellectual and social skills acquisition and broadening the narrow foundations of the Nigerian educational system. Collaboration between the Ford Foundation, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Western Region Ministry of Education led to the establishment of Aiyetoro Comprehensive High School in 1963. The school developed a Social Studies program providing relevant knowledge about Nigerian life and local communities (Obebe in Osaigbovo 2000). The pioneering educators at Aiyetoro produced the first Social Studies textbooks for lower secondary schools. From 1963 to 1969, the Comparative Educational Study and Adaptation Centre (CESAC) produced instructional materials for Social Studies in Nigeria, facilitating experimental teaching in selected secondary schools in Western Nigeria. Conferences on Social Studies were organized, emphasizing its potential to address societal problems. In 1968, the African Social Studies Programme (ASSP) held a significant conference in Mombasa, Kenya, advocating Social Studies education for primary schools and colleges of education. Integration of social science courses was also promoted for effective resolution of social, economic, political, and cultural issues.

In 1969, a fourteen-day symposium on Social Studies was held in Ibadan, resulting in the foundation of the Social Studies Association of Nigeria (SOSAN) and setting the path for the subject's subsequent growth. Moreover, the Northern states of Nigeria campaigned for the presence of Social Studies in the same year, and the National Curriculum Organization suggested teaching the rich Nigerian culture through Social Studies. The creation of the Department of Social Studies at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, as well as the Nigerian Educational Research Council (NERC), aided in the growth of the subject at all levels of education. In the 1970s, experts gathered at the Institute of Education, ABU, Zaria, to discuss

syllabus development and teaching materials for Social Studies in primary schools and teacher training colleges. Social Studies was introduced in the middle belt zone of Nigeria, and a national workshop sponsored by NERC produced the first national syllabus for primary school Social Studies.

The Nigerian Social Studies reached significant milestones and expanded in popularity over the years. It was regarded as a way of achieving the educational goals and assumed the role of history, geography, and civics education. Examinations and post-graduate courses were introduced, and Social Studies became mandatory. It was also made mandatory in all states, from institutions of education to primary and junior secondary schools. Today, a variety of Social Studies textbooks are accessible, and the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), in partnership with SOSAN, continue to organize seminars and workshops, progressively influencing attitudes towards the field.

Current State of Social Studies in Nigeria

The current state of Social Studies in Nigeria is therefore explained under the following headings:

Relevance of the Curriculum in Addressing Emerging Societal Issues

Nigeria's Social Studies curriculum has experienced some level of changes in response to urgent societal challenges. Examining themes like poverty, crime and criminality, disparities, the preservation of the environment, cultural diversity, democratic governance, and contemporary social concerns in society is emphasized. The curriculum seeks to enhance students' critical thinking, problem-solving, and civic engagement skills by emphasizing these concerns. It seeks to prepare them to become active and good citizens who can make positive contribution to the betterment of their localities and the nation as a whole. The ability and success of the discipline to achieve this goal has been the subject of many debates as Nigeria in recent times has witnessed a surge in negative vices such as cultism, religious intolerance; kidnapping

and banditry, internet fraud and wide spread moral decadence amongst others (Njokwu 2012, Aghahowa, 2023). According to Ndarwa 2007, a close observation of secondary school students' behavior and the general public indicates that they are unable to make appropriate moral decisions. Therefore in this regard we can conclude that much more is desired.

Instructional Methods and Approaches Employed

Various instructional methods and approaches are expected to be utilized in the Social Studies classrooms in Nigeria to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. However, research over the years revealed that teachers mostly utilize traditional lecture-based teaching. According to Adukwu (2004), among the several problems associated with curriculum implementation in Nigeria, poor teaching method ranks high. Teachers are expected to employ a combination of interactive discussions, group work, project-based learning, case studies, simulations, field trips and other learner centered approaches. These strategies might be the missing piece that allows students to apply what they have learned to real-world circumstances because they promote critical thinking, active engagement, and also the application of information. Additionally, the widespread use of technology integration – such as the usage of online platforms and multimedia resources – that gives students access to a wealth of knowledge and develops their digital literacy abilities is still lacking.

Availability and Utilization of Learning Resources

The place of learning resources in teaching cannot be overemphasized. According to Akin-Taylor and Ogunyemi (2018), the use of teaching materials is a very significant and necessary for the improvement and achievement of success by the Social Studies curriculum. Efforts have been made to ensure that learning resources are both available and utilized for Social Studies teaching in Nigeria and as such, textbooks, reference materials, and supplementary resources that aligned with the curriculum are regularly developed and distributed to schools. Additionally, schools

are encouraged to establish well-equipped Social Studies resource centers and libraries. However, there are still challenges regarding the accessibility and adequacy of resources, particularly in remote and underserved areas. More needs to be done to bridge remedy this situation and promote equitable access to quality resources for all students.

Teachers' Professional Development Opportunities

Recognizing the important role of teachers, Nigeria has made effort to prioritized professional development opportunities for Social Studies teachers. Workshops, conferences, and training programs are organized by educational institutions, government agencies, and professional associations to enhance teachers' pedagogical skills, content knowledge, and understanding of current trends in Social Studies education. These opportunities enable teachers to stay abreast of new methodologies, resources, and research findings, thereby improving their instructional practices and ensuring high-quality Social Studies education. The question then is, do the teachers for which these in-service training are designed take full advantage of these opportunities? What are the issues that prevent them from taking full advantage? The Social Studies teacher has an important part to play in the success of curriculum implementation. Relatedly, Igbokwe (2009) stated that even though a curriculum plan seems fantastic and the instructional method and instructional materials are well selected, if the teacher is not well trained and ineffective, the educational goals cannot be achieved.

The current condition of Social Studies education in Nigeria shows a dedication to relevance, effective instruction, resource availability, and professional growth. By continuously improving these aspects, Nigeria can further enhance the quality of Social Studies education, empowering learners to be active, informed, and engaged citizens capable of contributing meaningfully to the social, economic, and political development of the nation.

Challenges in Implementing Social Studies Curriculum in Nigeria

In Nigeria, the implementation of the Social Studies curriculum faces a number of obstacles and challenges that have an impact on its efficacy and quality. Among these difficulties are:

Teacher Competence and Training

According to Musa, Jimba, and Ogundele (2015), statistics reveal that a total of 207, 813 untrained teachers teach across Nigeria's 36 states, with the North-West geopolitical zone accounting for 48.8% and the North-East accounting for 57.7%. While the North-central has 38%, South-East 16.7%, South-South 19.2%, and South-West 6.7%. The situation is not different among Social Studies teachers as Adengideh (2009) opined that there seem to be a lot of untrained and non-specialist teachers in the Social Studies classroom. Social Studies students' learning is related to a variety of teacher's characteristics, one of which is their competence and it determines how students learn. Varied levels of teacher competence and inadequate training in Social Studies instruction contribute to implementation challenges. Some teachers may lack the necessary subject knowledge, pedagogical skills, and professional development opportunities to effectively deliver the curriculum. Inconsistencies in teacher quality across schools and regions can impact students' learning outcomes.

Inadequate Resources

In a research, Onele (2013) revealed that teaching resources for Social Studies in Nigerian junior secondary schools are inadequate. Social studies is a resource-intensive subject, and many teachers fail to employ instructional resources due to a variety of reasons, including a lack of teacher dedication to duty, insufficient teaching materials, and a lack of resourcefulness on the side of teachers and students. Many schools may not have access to current textbooks, instructional materials, and technology tools that are required for effective teaching and learning. Inadequate resources might restrict students' participation and understanding of Social Studies ideas.

Large Class Sizes

Nigeria public education system is characterized with overcrowded classrooms and poor student-teacher ratio. This makes it difficult for teachers to provide individualized attention and engage students effectively. Limited interaction and participation opportunities hinder students' understanding of Social Studies topics and inhibit active engagement with the curriculum. Teachers may struggle to meet the diverse needs of a large number of students within a limited timeframe.

Examination Focus and Rote Learning

There is heavy dependence on examination results and standardized testing in Nigerian schools and this leads to a narrow focus on memorization and regurgitation of information. Students study and read to pass examinations mostly, thereby discouraging critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and a deeper understanding of Social Studies concepts. Rote learning without practical application limits students' ability to analyze and apply knowledge to real-world situations.

Socio-cultural Context and Local Relevance

Nigeria's diverse sociocultural context presents a challenge in ensuring the Social Studies curriculum adequately addresses local and regional issues. According to Achuonye and Nyenwe (2013), a well-designed curriculum is essential to promoting a society's ideas and values. Social Studies is one of the curricula in the Nigerian education system that addresses societal norms and values; the curriculum clearly reflects the objectives of society and so there is need for customizing the curriculum to reflect students' cultural backgrounds, incorporating local examples and case studies, and promoting a sense of relevance to students' lives can be complex. Failure to address local context may result in a disconnection between the curriculum and students' realities.

Limited Professional Development Opportunities

Although there have been effort to promote teachers professional development in Nigeria, it has been grossly inadequate. Inadequate professional development opportunities for Social Studies teachers lead to implementation problems. Teachers must get ongoing training and assistance in order to keep current with new approaches, resources, and research results. Teachers' capacity to deliver the curriculum successfully is hampered by a lack of access to regular professional development.

Evaluation and Monitoring

The lack of a robust system for evaluating and monitoring the implementation of the Social Studies curriculum poses challenges. Adequate feedback mechanisms, regular assessment, and monitoring processes are necessary to identify areas for improvement, address implementation gaps, and ensure the curriculum aligns with educational goals.

Envisioning the Future of Social Studies in Nigeria: The Way Forward

Social Studies as a school programme still has a very bright future. The values of the subject can be said to be susceptible to guaranteeing a better future for the subject if well taught. Jarolimek (1973) has noted that "the great challenge facing Social Studies and, indeed, all of education in the years ahead is to teach young human beings how to live with each other peacefully, compassionately, and, above all, charitably." The open-ended nature of Social Studies encourages the discipline to accommodate social issues considered relevant to life. By this, it emphasizes integration and inter-relationship of knowledge. As Nigeria looks to the future, there are key areas that hold promise for the advancement of Social Studies education. These areas are discussed below:

Integration of Technology in Social Studies Education

The future of Social Studies education in Nigeria lies in harnessing the power of technology to enhance learning experiences. By

leveraging various technology tools such as interactive multimedia, digital resources, and online platforms, students may benefit from dynamic and immersive learning opportunities. Technology may help with access to a range of materials, as well as virtual field trips and collaborative learning possibilities. Students who embrace digital literacy skills will be able to properly navigate the digital world and interact practically with the vast amount of information that is available.

Integration of Global and Local Perspectives

To positively influence the future of Social Studies education in Nigeria, it is essential to embrace a curriculum that incorporates both global and local viewpoints. This curriculum should encompass multiple cultural, social, and economic viewpoints, extending beyond conventional historical and geographical narratives. By including these diverse perspectives, children can develop a profound understanding of their own community while also cultivating empathy and compassion towards different cultures and global challenges. The study of culture and diversity, according to the National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies (2021), allows learners to experience culture at all levels, from learning to adaptation, changing their respective lives and society itself. Students can build a feeling of global citizenship and become active participants in tackling social difficulties by merging local and global viewpoints.

Cultivating Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills

To effectively prepare students for the complexities of the future, it is crucial that Social Studies education prioritizes the development of critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. By engaging students in inquiry-based learning, fostering analytical thinking, and promoting evidence-based reasoning, they can acquire a deeper comprehension of social issues and master the skill of critically evaluating diverse perspectives. Placing emphasis on higher-order thinking skills empowers students to apply their knowledge to real-

world scenarios, make well-informed decisions, and contribute meaningfully to society.

Cultivating Partnerships for Improvement

To envision a prospective Social Studies education in Nigeria, partnerships and cooperation between educational institutions, government as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other stakeholders are required. Partnerships can help with resource sharing, professional development, and the sharing of best practices. Collaboration with local communities, museums, cultural organizations, and specialists in other sectors may strengthen Social Studies teaching by giving real learning experiences and viewpoints from a variety of sources. Stakeholder involvement in curriculum creation and implementation guarantees relevance, responsiveness, and sustainability.

The future of Social Studies education in Nigeria may be transformed by embracing technological integration, including local and global views, encouraging critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, and cultivating partnerships for growth. This vision holds the potential to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to become active, informed, and engaged citizens who contribute positively to their communities and navigate the complexities of an ever-changing world.

Conclusion

Examining the development of Social Studies in Nigeria – from its historical beginnings to the present and its hopes for the future – reveals both successes and setbacks. Nigerian Social Studies have grown and changed significantly throughout the years although more needs to be done to reposition the discipline. Important factors to take into account include the curriculum’s relevance in addressing social challenges, instructional strategies, resource availability and usage, and chances for teachers to pursue professional development. By addressing these issues, Social Studies instruction will become more effective and relevant, allowing students to gain a sense of global citizenship, cultural sensitivity, and critical thinking abilities.

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