

SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION: A CATALYST FOR NATIONAL UNITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Unity is generally seen as the bedrock to the development of societies of the world. This explains the reason why threat to the unity of any group of people is always viewed with all seriousness. The unity of Nigeria is therefore, paramount to her overall development; hence various strategies are usually mapped out to overcome any incidence that will threaten the oneness of her populace. One of such strategies adopted was introduction of Social Studies in the school curriculum with specific content that could heal the wounds of Nigerians and achieve unity in diversity. The paper therefore examines the concept Social Studies, Nigeria's national unity and how Social Studies and national unity are related. The paper concludes that both of them are closely related as they seek to strengthen the overall development of the country. The following recommendations were made in order to make Social Studies vibrant for the achievement of unity in Nigeria. These include: Pragmatic approach should be used in the teaching of Social Studies to instill attitudes of unity among learners, there should be a constant review of Social Studies curriculum to meet the challenges that are capable of threatening Nigeria's national unity and Social Studies should be taught at all levels of Nigeria educational system to enable the learners appreciate the value of unity in diversity.

Introduction

Unity is one of the major factors that determine the development of any society. Without peaceful co-existence among members of a society, its progress will be a mirage. The United Nations recognized the importance of unity as a driven factor for national and international development as early as 1998 in its declaration a human right aimed at bringing harmony among people of the world (UN Document, 1948).

The first objective of establishing the African union as contained in African Union Document (2012) is to achieve greater unity and solidarity between the African countries and the people of Africa. This has been evident in the incorporation of peace and security council established in Cairo, Egypt by its predecessor OAU, in 1993: establishment of Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution in 2011 at Lusaka, Zambia; as well as declaration of the Peace, Security Solidarity in Africa on the 8th November, 2012 at the third high-level retreat of special envoy and representatives of member states (African Union Commission, 2012).

The federal government of Nigeria has considered unity as a principal factor for development as contained in her national objectives which have been enclosed as necessary foundation for national policy on education (FRN, 2004). This is a clear indication that unity is a pre-requisite for the progress and development of any society; hence every society strives to achieve greater unity for its progress. Social Studies as a subject was brought to bear for the purpose of achieving unity in diversity. It is a problem solving subject that is usually introduced to solve prevailing societal problems. The Americans were fast to appreciate the value of Social Studies due to some unique challenges they had at that time. This was

followed by the British and later African countries including Nigeria (Aina, Adeyoyi, Obido & Ahmadu, 1982).

The Concept of Social Studies

Social Studies as an interdisciplinary subject cannot be easily defined. This is because it is cultural bound. Authors define it base on the culture of the societies they find themselves. Derek, (1981) sees Social Studies as a general term used for school curriculum subject that studies issues in social sciences. Dubey and Barth, (1980) define Social Studies as a set of goals that make up citizenship education content which should be selected, organized and taught to learners. The committee on primary school Social Studies defines it as common learning of man's interaction with his or her social and physical environment. It went further to state that it is not only a study but a way of life of how man influences and is influenced by his physical, political, economic, psychological and cultural environment.

This now brings us to the issue of whether Social Studies have the capability of bringing unity to Nigeria. The content of Social Studies is designed to accommodate human differences that bleed disunity. Social Studies derive its content from the aspects of social science subject contents that are meant for the reformation of human character for peace, unity and development. Ezoba (2012) agrees with this view as he maintains that Social Studies as interdisciplinary subject deals with concept generalization meant for national integration, socio-economic development as well as the development of right attitude and values which are needed for national unity. The second part of the definition of Social Studies as mentioned earlier clearly points to the fact that the subject is pragmatic in nature. It deals with everyday activities of mankind and that is why it is not just a study but a way of life. It is worth mentioning here that the problems that bring

disaffection among human beings cannot be said to be only political, social, economic, religious or psychological. It is against this background that Social Studies uses the content of social science subject to present learning experiences to learners in a holistic manner instead of compartmentalization as presented by those disciplines. Fageyinbo. (2004) agrees with this view as he asserts that Social Studies does not restrict its content as its relevant bodies of knowledge and skills have cut across all the social science subjects in order to achieve its defined objectives and goals. Torpev, (2007) opines that Social Studies is a subject that orientates learners on how to live harmoniously and take advantage of the environment around them. He therefore asserts that it is a subject which places man as a central point in its studies, how he influences his and his environment and the environment in turn influences him and his ability to cope with environmental influences. The definition talks about the first and second strike capabilities. Whatever may be the case, whether man is first to strike the environment or vice versa is not important. The important thing is the ability of man to withstand the shock of environmental influence and use it to his advantage.

In the opinion of Kisson (1981), Social Studies is a subject that should be constantly used by the society to instill in the learners knowledge, attitudes and actions which are considered important concerning the relationship human beings have with each other, their world and themselves; especially as it affords people to take advantage of the social environment for unity and peace. Fagbeyinbo (2000) notes that Social Studies as a subject has the capability of making learners to understand, interpret, manipulate and adjust to a particular environment. Ezeuzo (2011) corroborates this view as she asserts that Social Studies education no doubt is a veritable tool for promotion of peace and harmony in Nigeria. It should be equally noted that Social Studies as a subject has its objectives which originated

from the Nigeria national objective (Okonkwo 2004). These five national objectives are:

1. A free and democratic society
2. A just and egalitarian society
3. A united, strong and self-reliance nation
4. A great and dynamic economy
5. A land full of bright opportunities for all citizens (FRN, 2004)

A closer observation of these national objectives reveals that they are mainly for strengthening the peace and unity of Nigeria for national development. If this assertion is true, Social Studies objectives originates from the national objective and its contents is structured, structured towards the achievement of the objectives and therefore making it possible to bring unity and progress for Nigeria's national development.

Nigeria National Unity

Nigerians recognized unity of the nation as one of the strongest weapons that was used for the achievement of independence and Subsequent development of the country. On the declaration of independence of the country on 1st October, 1960, Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the first prime minister of Nigeria had this to say "...We are indeed proud to have achieved our independence, and proud that our efforts should have constituted to this happy event (Maxsiollun, 2008). This statement, filled with collective nouns clearly indicates that it was indeed a collective effort of all Nigerians irrespective of ethnic groups, religious affiliation and gender that resulted to this historical event which the present generation and that yet unborn will be proud of.

It was the crises that emanated among the political parties particularly in 1964 and subsequent coup and counter coup from members of the Nigerian Army which later resulted to the unfortunate civil war that threatened the unity of Nigeria (Ademoyega, 1981). Despite the 30 months civil war that almost ruined the nation's unity, Nigerians still came together as indivisible entity. General Yakubu Gowon, the then head of state of the federal republic of Nigeria, made it clear in his end of the war speech that there was no victor, no vanquish; the important thing was to pursue the three Rs which were rehabilitation, reconstruction and reconciliation for the national unity, a statement that was followed by his declaration of general amnesty (Maxsiollun, 2008; Adeyemoyega, 1981). Nigeria continues to live as one indivisible and indivisible nation despite some challenges which could not be compared to the ones she faced at the early stage of her independence. There were coups that over threw various civilian and military regimes. There were also other political turmoil, such as the annulment of June 12 Presidential election of 1993. But none had been able to throw the nation into disintegration.

However, the recent trends in the country particularly the emergency of various ethnic and religious militant groups have actually made many Nigerians to see a bold hand writing on the wall that the unity of the nation is threatened. All these might therefore have inspired Ezeoba (2012) to remark that the country appears to be in disunity as is evident in the inter-tribal wars some parts of the nation, kidnap incidences, campus cultism political and extra judicial killings, militancy and the most recent bomb blast that marked Nigeria's 50th jubilee anniversary. In her observation, Regina (2012) notes that the current wave of ethnic sentiments, loyalties and violence in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized and if not checked, may undermine the unity of the entire country.

Despite this challenges to national unity, well-meaning Nigerians still see the unity of the country as the only way for the nation to attain greater height among the comity of nations. It is against this background that president Goodluck Jonathan had to make it clear that the unity of Nigeria cannot be compromised (Ukaibe, 2012). The president made this submission at the peace conference organized by Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) held at Abuja. That submission was a response to the threat of secession of Biafra made by Movement for Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra and Bakassi peninsula declaration of self-independence. Former Head of State of Nigeria, Ibrahim Babangida and President Obasanjo Olusegun equally reiterated that the unity of Nigeria is not only priceless but non-negotiable (Kunle, 2012).

The call for unity of the country has become a major issue aimed at tackling the current challenges to the country. According to Chigozie (2012), members of non-governmental organizations, have equally come to lime light to call for unity of the country. John Adesina the coordinator of Sweet Mother International Organization responded to the bombing in Jos that claimed the lives of over 150 people by calling on all well-meaning Nigerians to embrace peace and unity as a key to the development of the society. The much demand for unity in the country makes Nigerians to believe that unity is an indispensable measure for achievement of better Nigeria. It is in line with this that the preamble of the Nigerian 1999 constitution dwelled on peace and unity as the best way of living among Nigerians (FRN 1999). The Nigeria National Policy on Education emphasized that Nigeria unity and harmony are the basic principles that would make the country to remain indivisible, in dissolvable, democratic and sovereign nation which was founded on the bases of freedom, equality and justice (FRN 2004). The unity of Nigeria is therefore an issue that cannot be taken for granted. This is because the success or

otherwise of this country depends on harmonies living among the populace. This explains the reason why cordial relationship should exist among Nigerians.

Social Studies and National Unity

Social Studies was not just introduced for the purpose adding subject to the existing ones in the Nigerian school curriculum. It was basically brought to bear with the intention of solving pressing Nigerian problem. Nigeria went through colonial trauma and needed a subject that would alienate them from colonial mentality (Fageyinbo, 2004). The civil war created a lot of differences among Nigerians. The issue was compounded due to many ethnic groups with diverse historical backgrounds and cultural differences that have made up Nigeria. There was therefore a need to introduce the subject that could heal the wounds of the civil war and equally achieve unity in diversity. Regina (2012) is of the view that Social Studies is a subject that could be used to achieve much needed unity, integration and stability. This explains the reason why Social Studies and national unity can be termed as birds of the same feathers, always flying toward one direction. To achieve this intention, the aim of introducing Social Studies in school curriculum as itemized by Aina, Adeyoyin, Obilo and Ahmadu (1982) is mainly to achieve national unity. These aims are:-

1. To develop in learners an understanding of their immediate surroundings.
2. To develop skills in learners that will enable them to deal with and manage the forces of the world in which they live.
3. To educate the learners on how to live harmoniously and in understanding of the different people who make up the Nigerian society (p11).

The above aims as identified by Aina et al (1982) have been corroborated with that of Social Studies Association of Nigeria whose first aims as contained in Article

three of SOSAN constitution is promotion of unity between all citizens in Nigeria and entire world (SOASN 2012).

Social Studies education therefore focuses its attention on the development of learner's attitudes; knowledge, skills and values that will enable him live peacefully with one another and equally contribute positively to the development of the society. It is against this background that National Curriculum Standard for Social Studies (1991) opines that the need for establishing Social Studies programme arises when a society determines that it requires formal institution to develop understanding, skills, attitude and action concerning human relationship among all members of the society. Sebiomo (2012) asserts that Social Studies work towards the promotion of attitudinal change in the lives of the citizens which usually results in creating citizenship education. Citizenship education is all about harmonious living, peaceful co-existence and unity in diversity.

The inclusion of peace education in Social Studies curriculum is a major effort towards achieving national unity. Wikipedia (2009) describes peace education as the process of acquiring the values, knowledge and developing attitudes, with oneself, other and environment, Falade, Adeyomi and Olowo (2011) describes the inclusion of peace education in Social Studies as a core aspect of the subject curriculum and a great effort to achieving national unity SOSAN (2012) corroborate this view as it maintains in its objective that the association is out to continually generate enthusiasm in the indebt study of social and cultural institutions for enhancement of knowledge and the stability of Nigerian society as a whole.

It is therefore important to note that in order to achieve stability in Nigeria Society, Social Studies education has a lot to do both in the classroom situation and

in co-curricular activities. First, the curriculum has to be structured towards imparting in the learners the society's values that unite the populace. Learners should be taught the importance of unity to the development of the country. Practical examples of nationalists and other Nigerians who are currently contributing to the unity and progress of Nigeria should always be given in the class to develop the spirit of patriotism in the learners. Emphasis should be laid down on the concept of unity in diversity which clearly point's to the fact that there is a need to unite together irrespective of our differences in many ways.

Teachers could initiate dialogue on issues of national unity after the learners are being exposed to the concept. On this note learners would be able to see the rationale behind unity in diversity. They can equally stress the issue of harmonious relation among people in parent teacher association meeting. This could help in eliminating the issue of communal crisis which affects the progress of not only the host communities but also the entire nation.

Above all, a teacher's commitment to his duty could earn them respect in the community, especially because they could be called upon to mediate when there are issues that would cause disunity among a group of people.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The discussion above points to the fact that when the concept of unity is removed from Social Studies curriculum, the subject will become vague. This explains the reason why most scholars usually see the concept of unity in diversity as one of the major pillars that holds not only Social Studies curriculum but the national development. Once unity is extracted from Nigerian core values, the integrity as well as the very existence of the nation is threatened. This is because it is only

through unity of purpose that Nigerians will have all their hands on deck to contribute their quota for national development and survival.

The paper therefore recommends the following for effective use of Social Studies education for achievement of national unity in Nigeria.

- Social Studies Association of Nigeria should not relent its efforts in organizing conferences: the conferences should be up-graded to international level.
- Pragmatic approach should be used in the teaching of Social Studies to instill the attitudes of unity among learners.
- There should be a constant review of Social Studies curriculum to meet the challenges that are capable of threatening Nigeria national unity.
- Social Studies should be taught at all levels of Nigeria educational system to enable the learners appreciate the value of unity in diversity.
- There should be provision by all the tiers of government honor those who have demonstrated good character for the unity of Nigeria, not only at the higher level but also at the grassroots level.

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