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NATURE AND POTENCY OF SOCIAL STUDIES IN  
DEALING WITH CORRUPTION AND MATERIALISM

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**Abstract**

*Corruption and materialism are serious menace which has affected nation-building in Nigeria to which effective solution are yet to be found. Since Social Studies aims at developing responsible citizenship among the learners, the paper looked at the nature and potency of the subject in dealing with the menace. The paper looked at some of the rationale for the introduction of Social Studies, concept of corruption and materialism, common features of corrupt practices in Nigeria were examined. Some of the efforts made by Nigerian government to curtail corruption and materialism were identified as well as some of the challenges confronting the fights against the menace. The place of Social Studies in the fight against corruption and materialism was also examined. The paper concludes that*

*attitudinal change through effective teaching of Social Studies is a major instrument in the fight against corruption and materialism in Nigeria. It was recommended among others that there is need to encourage selflessness among the learners through Social Studies teaching, inculcation of desirable values that eschew corruption and materialism through the value component of Social Studies, media literacy among the learners, as well as focusing on the affective component of Social Studies.*

**Keywords:** *Nature, Potency, Social Studies, Corruption and materialism.*

### **Introductions**

Social Studies is a subject area which aims at developing responsible citizenship in many nations of the world. It provides the knowledge, skills, and disposition of individual and proficient growth and national development. Social studies is an interdisciplinary subject area which focuses on broad personal, societal issues and problem and draws its knowledge base from all the social science disciplines and humanities. Gotep (2013) observed that Social Studies as a discipline is a vehicle that can be used for problem-solving in the society. One very important characteristic of Social Studies is its emphasis on classroom without walls in the community. The subject seeks to help young learners to acquire the essential knowledge and skills to develop in them the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions in a pluralistically diverse and democratic Nigeria. As at today, one of the teething problem confronting Nigeria as a nation that needs concerted effort to be addressed through the instrumentality of Social Studies is corruption and materialism. This has beclouded the reasoning of many Nigerians to the extent that many virtues that promote nation-building like selflessness, patriotism, loyalty, integrity, fair play and justice to mention but a few are been eroded continuously. Rotimi, Obasaju, Lawal and Ise (2013) described the menace of corruption in Nigeria as endemic and on the increase despite several attempts made by presents and

the previous governments to revolutionize the disfigurement. In addition, Rotimi et al. observed that in Nigeria, corruption has become the order of the day, practised among the young and the old, the politician and the non-politician as well as military and the non-military.

Materialism on the other hand, among Nigerians, may be attributed to an extensive breakdown of morality which manifests at various levels of indiscipline (National Teachers' Institute (NTI), 2000). The moral environment where there were ideal goals and norms pursued for the community's benefit has virtually disappeared, and with it is that inner legislation found in traditional laws or customs that guided men. One principal factor which could be responsible for this trend is the drive towards materialism. This paper tries to assess the nature and potency of social studies in dealing with corruption and materialism in Nigeria.

### **Nature of Social Studies**

Prominent scholars have defined Social Studies in ways that portray the subject as a value-laden discipline. For example, Social Studies was defined as "fundamentally studies of human connection, like human to human, human to institutions, human to the physical environment and human to value systems" (National Open University of Nigeria 2017:17). This implies that the subject is seen as one that encourages attention to be given to the process of living and working together, using of the environment to meet basic human needs, customs, institutions, values and life situations, cultural heritage and its dynamic on-going characteristics. In the same vein, the National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) (1992) in the United States of America officially defined social studies as: an integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. It was also stated by NCSS that:

*within the school program, Social Studies provides coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as Anthropology, Archaeology, Economics, Geography, History, Law, Philosophy, Political Science, Psychology, Religion, and Sociology, as well as appropriate content from the Humanities, Mathematics, and Natural*

*Sciences. The primary purpose of Social Studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world. (NCSS, 1992, p.1)*

This implies that the goal of Social Studies purely revolves around citizenship education, education for cultural integration and sustainable living. In the Nigerian context, Irmiya (2007:3) defined Social Studies as “an integration of experiences and knowledge concerning human relations for the purpose of citizenship education”. This justifies the reason why the discipline tries to build up in the personal qualities that help him/her to work together amicably in the course of utilizing available resources and materials from the environment.

### **Rationale behind the Introduction of Social Studies in Nigeria**

A number of reasons are responsible for the introduction of Social Studies in Nigerian schools, some of these reasons as given by (NTI: 2015) include the following:

- i. Nigeria’s encouraging answer to the curriculum modification trends in the world community whereby the former Soviet Union launching into space of Sputnik on October 4<sup>th</sup>, 1957 and America’s realization of the techno-human education that will boost human development encouraged the confidence of Nigeria to sue for that education via Social Studies that will improve human survival.
- ii. The acknowledged inadequacies and insignificance of Nigeria’s education up to self-government, which did not reflect Nigeria’s desires, tribulations in addition to aspirations, hence the need for Social Study for the education of persons who will be capable with the logical, philosophical and common skills to make life worth living.
- iii. Nigerians were disappointed with the disintegration of disciplines of Social Sciences and the Humanities which, in

- their uniqueness, presented a false view of the real world. Social Studies with its integrated approach to knowledge were seen as being capable of cutting across false subject divisions and presenting knowledge as an integral whole.
- iv. In the middle of the incidence of a huge number of unenthusiastic standards, poor manner to work, lack of respect to constituted power and absence of wisdom of patriotism, the foreword of Social Studies-a value-laden subject-was thought to provide a value re-orientation platform to inculcate socio-civic and emotional ability in our people.
  - v. The introduction of Social Studies in Nigerian schools was an implementation response of the decision of African countries at Mombasa, Kenya Conference in 1968 to the effect that all African countries should standardize its integrated Social Studies programme to go with its peculiar needs and aspirations.
  - vi. The success of the Social Studies pilot test at Aiyetoro, Abeokuta in Ogun state of Nigeria under the sponsorship of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Ford Foundation encouraged the introduction of Social Studies in Nigerian schools on a nation-wide scale.

### **Defining Corruption**

The issue of corruption is a global menace, without a uniform definition. It can be seen as a form of dishonest or unethical conduct by a person entrusted with a position of authority, often to acquire personal benefit. In Nigeria, corruption has become so endemic among many Nigerians irrespective of age, religion, profession and trade. Rotimi (2013) simply defined corruption as the misapplication of public resources to private ends. This among others include the public officials collecting bribes for issuing permits licenses for authorizing passage of goods at sea/airport, passports or visa, for awarding contracts or for enacting regulations designed to create artificial scarcity, awarding undeserved score or grades to students after exam, availing question papers to students before examination, and at times it may come in the form of sexual inducement or other

forms of gratifications. It is obvious that the root cause of corruption can be traced to an inordinate desire to acquire wealth and material possession without regard to moral values. This is known as materialism.

Materialism as a concept has been explained by different people from different walks of life. It is seen as preoccupation with or emphasis on material objects, comforts, and considerations, with a disinterest in or rejection of spiritual, intellectual, or cultural values (dictionary.com). Similarly, Mukherjee (2016) defines materialism as a dominating sense of desire to pursue wealth and other tangible things that can provide physical comforts that ignores the importance of spiritual values. It is also seen as placing a high value on income and material possession (Promislo, Deckop, Giacalone, & Jurkiewicz, 2010). Materialism promotes the idolatry of possession or material wealth (All about philosophy, n.d.). Corroborating this explanation, Monbiot (2013) sees materialism as a value system that is preoccupied with possessions and the social image they project. Since the concept of materialism has to do with excessive or dominating sense of desire to pursue wealth and other tangible things that provide physical comforts, Mukherjee substantiated the above explanation with the characteristics of materialistic people which include greed for money, tendency to become rich quickly even if it involves a lot of risks, desire to live in plush houses, wearing highly expensive clothes and jewellery and driving flashy cars.

Some of the effects of materialism on the society include personal satisfaction and greed, promotion of many other negative feelings which include lust, selfishness, jealousy, sense of hopelessness among others (Mukherjee, 2016), it forces us into comparison with the possessions of others, fosters social isolation and also diminish the wellbeing of those involved (Monbiot, 2013). In fact, materialism has been shown over a dozen of studies to be negatively related to personal well-being, including such indicators as happiness, life satisfaction, and health (Promislo, et al., 2010). Mukherjee also emphasized that as a result of materialism, people are forgetting their moral values and often fail to understand the distinction between right choices and the wrong ones. It is obvious that the root cause of corruption in every society is not too far from

materialism which encourages people to use dubious means to acquire wealth even if it is at the detriment of the wider society and the moral standard of the society.

### **Common features of corrupt practices in Nigeria**

The following are some of the common features of corrupt practices in Nigeria: (a) Giving and receiving bribes, (b) Inflation of contracts (c) Kick back and payment upfront (d) Abuse of public property (e) Lodging government fund in private accounts (f) Examination malpractices (g) Adulterated food or hazardous drugs (h) Misappropriation and embezzlement of fund (i) Money laundry by public officers (j) Using proxy names to buy property (Philips & Akiemule, 2014:6).

In addition, these features of corrupt practices in Nigeria are encouraged by the attitude of many Nigerians who are concerned with the wealth of people and not how that wealth was acquired. Philips and Akiemule (2014) corroborated this when they posited that Nigeria must be one of the very few countries in the world where a man's source of wealth is of no concern to his neighbour, the public or the government. This implies that wealthy people who are known to be corrupt are regularly courted and honoured by communities, religious bodies, social clubs and other private organizations. This implies that people who benefit from the largesse of these corrupt people rarely ask questions.

### **Evidences of corruption and materialism in Nigeria**

In Nigeria, it is evident from the probes on oil or petroleum subsidy fraud in Nigeria, fraudulent misappropriation of pension funds, recycling of items in the 2016/2017 Budget among others. Rotimi et al (2013) were of the view that the issue of corruption is growing worldwide concern over its spread due to so many factors. Highly corrupt nations are always perpetuated with the vicious circle of poverty, low rate of saving which leads to low incomes and which in turn leads to low investment and productivity. Others may include high capital flight: the negative consequences of the prevalent corruption continue to hamper the growth and development of the economy, causes insecurity of lives and property of the citizenry as

evident from several Boko Haram attacks, heightened the level of poverty and unemployment.

### **Efforts made by the government to curtail corruption and materialism in Nigeria**

Although, corruption has eaten deep into the fabrics of Nigeria's society, both previous and present administration have devised various strategies to address the menace. Some of these strategies identified by Akinola (2013:5) are as follows:

- i. Obasanjo in 1976 launched 'operation feed the nation' to curb the problem of hunger and unemployment which was a trap of corruption.
- ii. President Shagari lamented the institutionalization of corruption in Nigeria and launched the 'ethical revolution' as an antidote to the problem.
- iii. Buhari's regime in 1983 came up with series of draconian decrees to punish corrupt people. Buhari's government introduced the War Against Indiscipline (WAI) which was intended to inculcate in Nigerians the virtue of discipline, accountability, environmental sanitation, orderliness and work ethics.
- iv. Abacha launched War Against Indiscipline and Corruption (WAIC) to address the issue of corruption.
- v. Between 1999- 2007 when Obasanjo was elected as president of Nigeria; several attempts were made to curb corruption. He intensified the war on corruption through the establishment of the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) in 2000 and the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) in 2002.
- vi. Yar'adua pursued 7 point agenda and electoral reform. He also declared his assets as a means of waging war against corruption.
- vii. Goodluck's transformation agenda with ICPC and EFCC are still on course to fight this hydra-headed monster.
- viii. Buhari's re-election as President of Nigeria was masterminded by his anti-corruption drive.



### **Challenges of fights against corruption and materialism in Nigeria?**

In spite the fact that many governments made definite effort to address the challenge of corruption and materialism in Nigeria, it seems that not much has been achieved in the fight against corruption. Edinyan and Usang (2012:3), argued that the fight against corruption is ineffective because of:

The disingenuousness of the government itself acting in performance with several of its agencies, re-bargaining and compromise, highly positioned officials wedged of corrupt practices are made to part with some of their looted funds and are thereafter set free, low deterrent as disciplinary measures for corrupt practices are not strengthened, lack of virile political and social movements to tackle corruption. Other ones are lack of access to public information as a lot of secrecy still pervades government documents and this underlies the need for the passage of the freedom of information bill presently before Nigeria's National Assembly, insecurity of informers which calls for a need to enact laws to protect informers as well as reward them, low public participation in governance, corrupt electoral system, nepotism, system disorder, weak government institution.

With the challenges facing the fight against corruption highlighted, there is need to consider additional option in the fight against corruption. If the fight against corruption is not confronted with effective method, it then becomes an exercise in futility, hence the need to consider the place of Social Studies in this fight.

### **What then is the place of Social Studies in the fight against corruption and materialism in Nigeria?**

In as much as the challenges identified above are considered as an impediment to the fight against corruption and materialism, it is imperative to point out that the successful implementation of Social Studies curriculum will contribute immensely in fighting corruption and materialism in Nigeria. Akinola (2013) opined that Social

Studies education is an avenue for providing young people with a feeling of hope in the future and confidence in their ability to solve the social and environmental problems of individuals, their country, state or nation. Social Studies adopt a horizontal spiral approach in the analysis of its problems. In addition, Otoja (2013) observed that, the content of education which includes: honesty, integrity fortitude; tolerance, sympathy, punctuality, dignity of labour, loyalty, consideration for other and so on, are all part of Social Studies education content which can be used to foster and fight corruption in Nigeria. Moreover, Eteng (2012) outlined the understated as ways Social Studies can bulldoze corruption impeding Nigeria and Africa in general:

- i. The study of Social Studies, particularly some of the new frontier areas i.e. civic education and citizenship education, will expose its beneficiary to all socio-civic competence and effective citizenship such as inspiring feelings of patriotism, and these will make them socially distant from corruption and corrupt induced practices, temptations, incentives and circumstances.
- ii. The study of Social Studies will inculcate worthy attitudes and habits (worthy character development) that will go a long way in eliminating corruption and instituting needed changes for national transformation.
- iii. Through the enter-educate instructional mode in Social Studies, corruption inhibiting educative content can be taught in an informal entertainment looking situation through educational miming, entertainment-oriented, students' group, social-drama or creative dramatics, storytelling, music, songs, dances, playlist, role – playing, educational simulation, recorded video films or tapes as used in Venezuela and Hong Kong which can be replayed from time to time at the relaxation whims of the students. The effects of the language-vision oriented enter-educate instructional mode in Social Studies delivery with regard to arousing emotions, inner conviction, feelings and resistance against temptation to indulge in corruption and all that is synonymous with such as moral decay

- or depravity, organized begging, chameleonic praise signing, lasciviousness and squandermania and enhancing interest and acceptance of positive change and tremendous.
- iv. The social content area of Social Studies curriculum debunks social maladies such as corruption.
  - v. Social Studies education in its integrated holistic frame, as against the other subjects in their separate fragments, is in a better position to analyse the parameters of massive corruption in Nigeria viewing it as an integral whole and equipping the learner with cognitive skills to proffer well thought out recommendations that will defuse corruption and place national transformation on the right pedestal.

Social Studies education by virtue of its nature and content is able to bring about the desired change and national transformation because it places a premium on corruption prevention, avoidance, resistance, non-indulgence or abhorrence via right character propelled self-discipline as against coercive discipline of the anti-corruption efforts or commissions.

### **Conclusion**

It is an established fact that the economic woes of Nigeria are not too far from corruption which was entrenched by materialism exhibited by Nigerians. In order to reverse this trend, there is a need for attitudinal change through value clarification among Nigerians. One of the major instruments that could be used to achieve this positive value is through effective teaching and learning of Social Studies in our schools. Proper teaching and learning of value contents in Social Studies will not only improve conceptualization of values but will also curtail other societal ills, such as excessive materialism, examination malpractice, cultism, corruption, social and political differences in Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

The effects of corruption in Nigeria are quite legendary and have diminished all genuine efforts at driving the nation on the path to development and change. Given the above scenario, the authors

made the following recommendations so that Nigeria would realize her full potentials and be able to key into the present change paradigm that is sweeping across the globe through the effective use of Social Studies at all level of education in Nigeria:

- i. There is need to encourage selflessness among the learners through Social Studies teaching so as to disabuse the minds of the young ones from the present materialistic consciousness which engenders corrupt practices in Nigeria.
- ii. The value education component of Social Studies should be properly taught, so as to inculcate desirable values that eschew corruption and materialism among the young ones.
- iii. There is need to inculcate media literacy among the learners to enable them to exercise self-control whenever they observe or watch any advertisement which could create the desire for materialism in them. Through that avenue, they will be able to distinguish what is needful from mere desires and wants.
- iv. Social Studies educators need to refocus their attention in the course of teaching to the affective component of Social Studies and not just the cognitive component which has little impact in transforming the attitudes of the learners towards becoming responsible citizens that are free from corrupt tendencies and materialism.
- v. Social Studies teachers can drive home the message of corruption and materialism by using the life of patriotic Nigerians who eschew corruption and materialism in the course of their duties in order to encourage the learners to model their lives after such individuals.

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