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SOCIAL STUDIES AS A KEY PRIMARY SCHOOL SUBJECT  
IN NIGERIA: RELEVANCE FOR THE OVERALL  
DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIA'S PUPILS (1970 - 2000)

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**Abstract**

*Nigeria's primary school curricula contents have downgraded the coveted position of the subject of Social Studies in schools. This has adversely impacted the quality of education children receive at school, with the effect that the social consciousness engendered by this school subject is denied the country's younger generation. Hence, this paper discusses the relevance of Social Studies as a primary school subject. The purpose of this paper therefore is to examine the role and value of this crucial subject for the enhanced development and intellectual empowerment of Nigeria's school children in the academic curricula of primary school education in Nigeria. In doing this, it is the plan of this paper to adopt the qualitative method of data analysis. This is considered necessary in view of the need to give this work the needed scientific treatment it demands. This paper reveals that the post-civil era in Nigeria adversely affected the intellectual emancipation of*

*younger Nigerians. Following the devastating effects which the war years made on the country's younger generations of school-goers, it became incumbent to re-direct their ways of thinking and doing things, in order to build a better Nigeria for all. To that end, this paper is of the view that the teaching and learning of Social Studies in all primary schools in Nigeria must be effectively sustained. Obviously, there is every need to continue to review the curricula contents of this subject in the light of the 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges.*

**Key words:** Primary, School, Social, Studies, Subject

### **Introduction**

Obviously, the complexity of the numerous challenges facing Nigeria in this 21<sup>st</sup> century requires the active participation, collaboration, and sincere commitments of the entire citizenry to the course of effective nation-building. This is an indication that to deal precisely and successfully with the numerous challenges facing the Nigerian nation in this era, which attempt to scuttle the country's ship of development and continued existence as a united and indivisible nation, there is need to position the curricular of primary school education at its rightful place. Because of the fundamentality of this educational level towards the realization of effective national development, the active participation and engagement of the entire citizenry through the enrolment of young children into primary schools becomes quintessential.

Again, because primary school education forms the bedrock of all other educational levels, its relevance to national development needs not to be over-emphasized. This becomes most pronounced as virtually all citizens and families, irrespective of their different callings pass through the primary school education, as a starting point. There is therefore no single professional life where this basic educational knowledge does not play pivotal roles. At that, the quality of education children receive at that level obviously plays fundamental roles in shaping Nigeria's development, as well as

impacting the human capacity potentials of citizens (Lugard, 1922; Iwunna, 2011; Oniwon, 2019).

Based on this understanding therefore, the fundamentality of Social Studies as a primary school subject for the overall development and intellectual empowerment of Nigeria's children whose ages range between 6 and 12 years all over the country cannot be ignore in any way. This paper seeks to underpin some of those key factors which support its relevance as a primary school subject, whose contents are designed to promote the effective development of Nigeria's young children who are still at the foundational stages of their educational lives. As a matter of fact, knowledge from the curricular contents of this primary school subject builds up and enriches children's knowledge of positive attitudes, which in the words of Chiawa (2009), enable young learners in primary schools wrestle against negative attitudes which are detrimental to effective human development.

In effect, sound knowledge of Social Studies as a subject in primary schools is irreplaceable for the overall empowerment of young children on various citizenship roles. It also inculcates into them the attitudes of loyalty and selfless service to humanity, as well as arms them with adequate intellectual and socio-political skills needed to build bridges of peace and unity across the nation's diversity of ethnic nations. These are indicators to the effect that the Nigerian nation would definitely develop better in an environment of peace and stability. By that, stronger bridges of peace and unity among the populations of Nigeria, made up of a multiplicity of ethno-linguistic nations estimated at about 499 ethnicities could flourish more healthily under socio-political conditions of love and oneness among fellow Nigerians (Nwobodo, 2000; Iwunna, 2011).

Obviously, these core nation building objectives could become more feasible once the educational curricular on primary school Social Studies is effectively designed and properly focused to perform these essential roles within the Nigerian society. Through the auspices of the educational curricular, and most importantly, starting from the primary school levels, young Nigerians would be motivated to begin early enough to appreciate school education as a viable tool of nation building and human development. On the strength of

this conviction, Obeta (1996) claims as follows: “Social Studies is no longer a new subject. It has gained grounds at all levels of our educational system.”

At that, citizens’ awareness and willingness to perform their numerous civil, political, and economic roles within the Nigerian society could be effectively articulated. Consequently therefore, a strong knowledge, and adaptation of the curricular contents of this essential school subject into daily lives, and activities in the society, influences the overall development of learners. These also influence their dispositions in the handling of their official responsibilities in this country, with the effect that they become genuinely empowered to contribute to Nigeria’s development as leaders at different levels of the society (Nwobodo, 2000).

Moreover, it is quite obvious that nations develop better and faster in an environment of peace and tranquillity. Towards the realization of these objectives, world nations invest maximum fiscal, material, and logistic resources in the educational empowerment of their younger citizens, starting from their earliest years at school. This underpins the relevance of the popular slogan: “teach them young,” which obviously starts from the primary school levels. This becomes highly crucial because education holds the golden rays of light which navigate citizens’ general attitudes and commitment to national development. Based on this understanding, Depaepe and Smeyers (2008) strongly contend that “the role of education in the formation of the modern nation-state” cannot be over-emphasized.

To that end, it is not surprising that nations of the world spare no resources in their efforts to provide the best quality education to their younger generations. For them, this is considered highly fundamental for effective human development and genuine national growth. This is an indicator that nations become stronger economically and otherwise when their educational systems succeed in producing right-thinking citizens, positive-minded individuals, hard working nationals, and development-conscious persons. On the contrary, nations literally mourn and weep when their educational systems fail to produce the right fruits, but rather produce mere dullards, intellectual morons, criminals, sycophants, economic dwarfs, abject illiterates, unemployable individuals,

religious intoxicants, and unwanted hooligans, whose activities rather stagnate national development and ridiculously damage the image of their fatherland (Fafunwa, 1974; Arinze, 1982; Omolewa, 2006; Sofadekan, 2016; Iwunna & Okoro, 2017).

With these in view, one can only add that there is no substitute for an educational curriculum which empowers, educates, provides opportunities for skills acquisition, and prepares citizens for genuine and selfless service to fatherland. That is service to family, community, and the larger nation, without demanding some undue gratifications or amassing of illegitimate wealth at the detriment of the generality of the larger populations of the country. To that end therefore, there is need for a continued critical review of the educational curriculum in order that it provides answers to the numerous challenges of effective nation building, as well as the impartation of the diverse intellectual skills and educational knowledge which promote healthy citizenship (Inyang & Ojedokun, 2016). Based on these, Hargreaves (1994) concedes that the contents of nations' educational curricular have become powerful tools of social change, national development, human capacity emancipation, and instruments of scientific and technological growth.

Based on this understanding, Goodson (1994) strongly concedes that the quality and contents of the educational curricular provide veritable arena for the assertion of national identity. Materials children and young learners receive at schools lay the foundations for the quality of citizens they graduate into. These are indicators that the educational curricular and their contents shape and influence the type of future and developmental legacy any global nation would bequeath to her citizens. Starting from the primary school levels therefore, no should be left in any doubt that the knowledge children are exposed to, through their various school subjects determine the quality and strength of the foundations governments lay for the future of the nation. Consequently, these influence the intellectual, physical, and mental developmental emancipations of the nation's future leaders.

As a school subject, the various lessons which Social Studies, offers to young children in primary schools in Nigeria plays significant roles in shaping the future of the nation, as well as

informs the preparedness of these younger persons to take over the mantle of leadership in the future. Strengthened by this intellectual wealth of knowledge, citizens position themselves appropriately to build bridges of unity all over the country, as well as desist from engaging in any criminal activities which could dent the good image of Nigeria. Through effective primary school curricular on Social Studies, Nigeria's primary school pupils start early enough to imbibe and internalize the values of healthy citizenship, if placed in positions of authority, shun all forms of corrupt practices, reject sectionalism, kick against all forms of abuse of power, and rather fight with all their hearts and minds against any activities which militate against Nigeria's growth and emergence as a global nation. These are some of the key values which the post-civil war educational curricular on this subject intended to achieve, most especially at the turn of the new millennium (Awolowo, 1968; Fafunwa, 1974; Arinze, 1982; Odumegwu-Ojukwu, 1991).

Thus, at the end of Nigeria's civil war with Biafra in January, 1970, there emerged the need to deploy the educational curricular as a strong tool of national re-orientation, citizenry education and development, national reconciliation with the warring factions of the nation (the Igbo areas), as well as an instrument of effective nation building and human capacity development. The curricular of education at the different levels came to be appreciated, tailored, and propagated as viable agents of reconstruction, reconciliation, and rehabilitation.

At the primary school levels therefore, the federal government embarked on the projects of evolving relevant educational curricular which could aid young Nigerians heal the wounds exacerbated by the bloody civil war, look forward to a better and more peaceful Nigeria, and refuse to begrudge their fellow Nigerians who pulled the triggers of war. Thus, the post-civil war period of 1970 to 2000 became an era when the educational curricular was better positioned and effectively strengthened to become a key developmental agent and tool of national growth. These obviously provided answers to the question of the need for appreciate the role of Social Studies as a viable instrument for the attainment the numerous national objectives which could influence the thinking patterns of citizens

and attitudinal transformations of Nigerians in the new millennium (Fafunwa, 1974; Arinze, 1982; Odumegwu-Ojukwu, 1991).

Thus, the period of 1970 and 2000 in Nigeria witnessed concerted government's efforts in the areas of providing improved curricular of education in Nigerian schools. The period recorded serious efforts in the areas of detaching Nigeria's educational curricular from unnecessary colonial influences and neo-colonial incursions. It also represented a period in history when military regimes took over governance and disrupted the country's educational development, as well as crippled the nation's democratic growth. With the military in power, aggressive human rights violations became rampant, position of education as a tool of human and national development encountered severe displacements, even as key educational development projects suffered setbacks. Citizens lost faith in government, thereby creating favourable grounds for the perpetration of corrupt practices, abuse of office, reckless bribery by government officials, and looting of public funds and property. It is in an attempt to tackle these menaces and national challenges that the relevance of Social Studies in impacting the human and infrastructural development of Nigeria, as well as resetting the mindsets and attitudes of Nigerians in this 21<sup>st</sup> century (Muritala, Isiaka, Bello & Yusuf, 2019).

Thus, it is a glaring fact that Nigeria's primary school education has endured years of negligence. Primary school education in Nigeria has been badly funded and terribly mismanaged with the effect that the necessary teaching and learning infrastructures required for effective classroom education are often lacking. Policy matters concerning the improvement of primary school education in the country must never be politicized. Above all, the management and inspection of primary schools in Nigeria must be strictly handled by trained professionals and never political powerbrokers. These underpin the need to support Nigeria's curricular on Social Studies with the relevant contents that are capable of equipping young learners with the professional skills and intellectual strengths required of them to tackle the country's several developmental challenges in this 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond. At that, there is therefore the need to impart young pupils with the educational knowledge



which motivates them to acquire and imbibe the right attitudes which promote national cohesiveness devoid of any ethnic, religious, tribal, or selfish sentiments. The critical point therefore lies on 'catching them young.' The dictum of 'catching them young' is considered fundamental because equipping children with the appropriate knowledge from their tender years goes a long way in shaping and dictating the type of citizen they grow into as adults. This therefore emphasizes the dire need for delivery of effective primary school education to the upcoming generation of Nigerians, hence, this study.

### **Primary School Education in Nigeria**

The history of the arrival of primary school education in Nigeria cannot be exhausted without placing the British imperial government at her rightful position of prominence. In effect, the story of the birth of this level of education in Nigeria is overwhelmingly synonymous with the arrival of colonial education in this part of the world. This is an indication that this education counts among the key educational and developmental legacies which hallmarked the British domination of Nigeria, starting from the historic year of 1861.

In which case, this former colonial territory named as Nigeria, which formally became a British colony at the conclusion of the great Berlin Conference (1884/1885) had no contact with primary school education prior to the arrival of the British government in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, following the successful historic amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates into a single administrative territory under the British flag in 1914, during the regime of Lord Fredrick D. Lugard as the Governor-General, the name Nigeria, was stamped and sealed as the official identity of this ethnically diverse nation (Lugard, 1922; Fafunwa, 1974; Omolewa, 1986; Nwobodo, 2000; Iwunna, 2011).

Enrolment into primary school education marks the formal commencement of children's educational careers in Nigeria. This level of education is designed for young children whose ages range between 6 and 12 years (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014). During this time, children make serious brain growth and numerous physical



development, which according to Wood (2015), in Nwachukwu (2018), “lay the foundation of subsequent learning and development.” It adds that some of the developments occur naturally when parents and children spend time together doing domestic activities. This source then concludes that at this stage, children still stay around their parents and adult family members, who protect them, care for them, and show them love. During this stage of their lives, they are very much dependent on parents, relations, and adult members of their families and local communities.

In Nigeria, the period of primary school education represents a great hallmark in their future endeavours as academics and other professionals. It is a period when young children are equipped with the basic skills which they require to navigate the traumas and challenges of life prior to maturing into adulthood. Several of them bow out at the completion of this educational phase. Basically, the education they receive at this stage in their lives empowers them with the basic literacy skills which enable them read, write, comprehend written texts, and make simple calculations which they require in their daily lives as adults. Armed with these fundamental skills, they become supported to live independently, devoid of all unnecessary dependence on others for assistance (Fafunwa, 1974; Omolewa, 2001; Iwunna, 2011).

With these in context, Fafunwa (1974), and the National Teachers’ Institute (1983) identify clearly that Nigeria’s primary school education is guided by the country’s Philosophy of Education, which is programmed to impart permanent literacy and numeracy into young learners. It is also planned to lay strong foundations for effective scientific and reflective thinking among young learners. This level of education is programmed to impart primary school children with the ability and intellectual skills to solve personal and social problems by using their individual intelligence. The education also seeks to equip them with strong citizenship education that empowers them with the ability to perform their roles as citizens of this country, and able to exhibit sound character based on effective moral dispositions. The education also seeks to impart into young learners strong attitudes of adaptability to one’s changing societal environments, as well as the ability to identify with one’s neighbours.

As well, Nigeria's philosophy of primary school education is structured to enhance learners' physical, emotional, and intellectual growth. By that, it seeks to equip learners with effective manual skills, with due respect to recognition of and respect for manual work. It also seeks to provide adequate opportunities that encourage learners to develop effective mechanical, vocational, and manipulative skills. Furthermore, Nigeria's Philosophy of Education is also equip young learners with the skills to develop the ability to communicate effectively, as well as imbibe strong attitudes of self discipline at private and public places.

With these in perspective therefore, Nigeria's Policy on Education (2014) identifies a number of objectives which guides the provision of the nation's primary school education. Among others, it maintains that the nation's primary school education is pursued basically with the objectives of inculcating permanent literacy, numeracy and ability to communicate effectively into learners. It is intended to lay a sound basis for scientific, critical and reflective thinking among young learners. The education also seeks to promote the attitudes of strong patriotism, fairness, understanding and national unity among young Nigerians. It also intends to instil strong social, moral norms and values into young Nigerian children. Through the curricular of primary school education, it is also intended to impart in the children the ability to adapt to their changing environments. The education is also intended to provide opportunities for the child to develop life manipulative skills that will enable him or her function effectively in the society within the limits of children's capability.

As a matter of fact, it must be appreciated that the attainment of primary school education is identified as the constitutional right and compulsory for every Nigerian child, irrespective of gender, social status, religion, colour, and ethnic background (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1979; & Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014). At the global level too, UNICEF (1990), and UNICEF (2001) also recognize children's enrolment into primary schools as the undeniable and natural right of children all over the world, irrespective of location, religion, cultures, and economic situations. For effective development and human empowerment, this foundational education is

considered highly crucial in view of the role which this educational training plays in the lives of attendees and their nations.

Thus, giving children the opportunity to enjoy this basic education lays strong foundations for their future development, as well as equips them with adequate intellectual and physical skills to play strong and conscientious leadership roles in the society, as well as empowers them with the potentials to contribute to national development at different capacities when they mature into adult citizens of the land. By that, knowledge gained from primary school education motivates young children with the relevant enablement which qualify them to function as formidable development partners.

### **Relevance of Social Studies for Primary School Education**

The relevance of Social Studies, one of the key subjects taught in primary schools, cannot be exhausted in a few short statements. Its impact and fundamentality as an instrument of change, and the overall development of young children in Nigeria remain quite crucial for the continued existence of Nigeria as a united, indivisible, democratic, and multicultural nation. This has become crucial most especially between 1970 and 2000 which marked the 1<sup>st</sup> two decades of the end of Nigeria's civil war with Biafra. Thus, the teaching and learning of this subject in primary schools played pivotal roles in realizing the nation's programs of rebuilding, rehabilitation, and re-construction of the country after the war ended (Kirk-Greene; & Rimmer, 1981; Odumegwu-Ojukwu, 1991). These shall be discussed briefly under the following subheadings:

### **Citizenship Education in Social Studies**

The subject of Social Studies in primary schools educates young children on the numerous citizenship roles which they are expected to play in the society. As was the case, the civil war era in Nigeria left a number of negative trends which the Federal Government of Nigeria intended to checkmate through the auspices of effective classroom education, and most importantly through the curricular of Social Studies. For instance, it was intended that citizens' effective knowledge of their citizenship roles would enhance their dispositions to imbibe the different positive attitudes which enable them show

love to one another, irrespective of any differences in religion, ethnicity, or family background, as well as show respect to the nation. As a school subject, it also inculcates into young children those desirable values, and meaningful social skills which support learners contribute meaningfully to national development, as well as promote and launder the good image of the nation in the eyes of the international community (Ilesanmi & Ilesanmi, 1991; Njoku, 1999). At that, children begin early enough in their primary school days to appreciate the need to respect Nigeria's national flag, which is green, white green, wherever it is hoisted. As a key national emblem, this subject teaches them to bow their heads in respect to the flag each time they cite it anywhere. The great lesson is that young learners are made to know from their younger days in school that the national flag is a unique emblem or symbol which represents Nigeria wherever it is mounted, and as such deserves to be respected appropriately (Merriam-Webster, Eds., 1999).

As well, the teaching and learning of Social Studies in primary schools educates young children on their various political rights as Nigerians. This subject teaches them to vote and be voted for during elections in Nigeria, so long as they meet the pre-requisite age of 18 years and above. It also exposes them to the awareness of their rights to vie for any political positions in the country which they qualify for, and refuse to be intimidated from any quarters. Children also learn to shun all electioneering malpractices such as rigging of elections, falsification of election data, engagement in any forms of bribery and undue gratifications during elections, as well as developing the muzzle to vote according to their conscience and for the candidates of their free choice. At that, this subject teaches children that engaging in any of these unhealthy practices is illegal and detrimental to genuine national development (Odumegwu-Ojukwu, 1991; Njoku, 1999; Nwobodo, 2000).

Similarly, this subject also exposes young children to the awareness of their duties and responsibilities to the Nigerian nation as her citizens. These include payment of taxes and rates as at when due, contributing one's quota to national development, serving the nation selflessly without bias, respect for the numerous laws of the land, maintenance of the good image of the country both within

and outside the nation, avoidance of all activities which could ridicule the reputation of Nigeria, exhibiting the attitude of love and accommodation for fellow citizens anywhere within the globe, shunning of all corrupt practices, rejection of all attitudes of criminality both within and outside the shores of Nigeria, sowing of the seeds of peace and peaceful reconciliation to all issues of difference wherever they arise in Nigeria, as well as developing the resilience to make positive contributions that enhance the unity and continued togetherness of Nigeria, thereby promoting her continued existence as an indivisible entity (Kirk-Greene & Rimmer, 1981; Ilesanmi, & Ilesanmi, 1991; Nwobodo, 2000).

As well, Social Studies begins early enough to teach young children the cultures and attitudes of respecting their elders, uncles, community leaders, their local heads and legislators, governors, and the nation's president. This subject imparts into young children the different greeting patterns and behavioural codes of conduct which are acceptable within their communities and beyond. It brings to the awareness of the younger generations the cultures of shunning all attitudes and practices which bring disrepute to themselves, their families, community, and Nigeria as a whole. These include rape, drug abuse, money laundering, prostitution, smoking of illicit concoctions, bribery and corruption, elections rigging and ballot box snatching, etc. It also brings children to the awareness that engagement in any of those activities is illegal, and if caught, appropriate penalties and punishments must be meted out to the offenders (Fafunwa, 1974; Awoyemi, Sakoma, Obi, Okunade, Irueghe & Sani-Ibrahim, 1991; Njoku, 1999).

In addition, this essential school subject also teaches young children to be conscious of their nationhood as Nigerians, and be proud and bold enough, always and everywhere, to defend and protect the integrity of the country wherever they find themselves as Nigerians within the globe. That being the case, this subject teaches that Nigerian citizens all over the world must respect the laws of their host nations, play by the rules, and ensure that their attitudes paint good images of this country all the time. At that, the curricular contents of this essential subject reminds Nigerians to always perceive themselves as ambassadors and unsung images of

their beloved fatherland, while also bearing in mind that their good or bad attitudes speak volumes about their nation of origin – Nigeria (Fafunwa, 1974; Arinze, 1982; Mbayuav & Terna, 2011; Muritala, Isiaka, Bello & Yusuf, 2019).

Furthermore, this subject teaches Nigerians to be ambassadors of peace and unity of the Nigerian nation. Considering the fact that Nigeria is made up of an estimated 499 distinct ethnic and linguistic units, and appreciating the fact that it is only in an environment of peace and unity that this rare human quality is sustained and maintained, the lessons contained on the pages of this subject therefore invites Nigerians to fight for peace at all costs, and reject all forms of anarchy and confrontational acts of disunity with all impunity. At that, this subject strongly teaches Nigerians that the benefits of peace are everlasting, while the effects of anarchy and war are simply devastating and dangerously horrible. By that, Social Studies teaches young learners in primary schools to embrace peace all the time and at all costs, as well as live in harmony with fellow Nigerians, irrespective of their differences in language and religion (Iwunna, 2011; Olayode, 2019).

Most importantly too, as patriots and good citizens of Nigeria, lessons on this subject teaches Nigerian youth and children to desist from participating in any manner or form in the creation, or circulation of fake news. This subject also encourages them never to be part of any acts of misinformation, most especially in this digital era when all manner of information are placed on the social media, all with the intentions of creating havoc, anarchy, or disunity in parts of Nigeria. Regrettably, these have been responsible for raising tensions among citizens, ignited the ugly flames of war, and causing the disintegration of once-peaceful nations, leading to unnecessary loss of precious lives of innocent citizens. In Africa, the sad incidents of wars in Rwanda, South Sudan, Central African Republic, and Democratic Republic of Congo, among others, are quick reminders.

### **Emphasis on the Dignity of Labour**

The cultures of all Nigerian ethnic communities abhor all forms of indolence, laziness, lousiness, and idleness. Instead, the numerous

cultures of Nigeria celebrate hard work, and respect persons who engage themselves and their precious times in some legitimate sources of income generation. This subject therefore exposes young learners to the awareness of a number of professions which they can subscribe to after passing out of school. It introduces to several professional skills which create healthy sources of income generation for them after graduating from school.

At that, young learners are given the awareness of professional opportunities which fetch monthly salaries, as well as those which give self employment. Thus, the curricular contents of this subject encourages Nigerians to work hard, work well, earn their own incomes, and avoid being forms of economic burden to themselves and family members. The lesson is that poverty, criminality, and unwarranted begging for alms shall be curtailed in Nigeria, while economic security and the dignity of citizens could be protected (Ilesanmi, & Ilesanmi, 1991; Njoku, 1999).

### **Knowledge of the Basic Home and School Rules**

Social Studies also teach children some of the basic rules and regulations which guide their conducts and activities at home and at school. These guiding rules and regulations assist children develop good characters, imbibe strong moral formations, and apply same in their everyday conducts, even in their adult lives. The rules include the following: regular washing of hands, praying to God always, cleaning the mouth every morning, proper disposal of refuse, reading of school books and other literatures, proper conduct of oneself in public places, and washing of one's clothes regularly (Awoyemi, et al, 1991).

As a matter of fact, knowledge of these principles, as well as their application to life enhances healthy living. For instance, in this era of the dreaded Covid-19 Pandemic, which has already claimed millions of innocent lives worldwide, adaptation to these basic rules and regulations could save many lives, protect citizens from the disease, and reduce its spread in towns and communities of Nigeria. Unfortunately, in Nigeria, the disease has already affected almost 50,000 persons, while almost a thousand deaths have already been reported by the news media. Meanwhile all educational institutions



have been shut down globally, while economies are in total shambles (Mohamedbhai, 2020). It is therefore crucial that children are introduced to these basic rules from an early age, such that even in adult life, they could still be made relevant in their daily lives.

### **Lessons on Indigenous Cultures and Traditions**

For a better understanding of this brief discussion, let us define the concept of indigenous cultures and traditions as the specific manner of living of a given people. According to our source, these are inclusive of the way a people behave, live their daily lives as social, religious, and economic people. It adds that these concepts speak of those characteristics which define and identify a particular people, and distinguish them from all other peoples. These include their dressing patterns, speech making methods, eating cultures, greeting patterns, dancing styles, marriage celebrations, naming ceremonies, burial rites, etc. Thus, a people's cultures and traditions simply refer to those "spoken or unspoken values that manifest themselves in everything we say, do, or think" (American Family Tradition, 2000/2009).

As a school subject therefore, Social Studies teaches young children the different cultures and traditions which are celebrated by their own people and local communities. It exposes them to the awareness of those local values and traditional celebrations which are unique with their specific language communities. This knowledge becomes quite crucial because of the multiplicity of Nigeria's ethnic communities, which are estimated to number about 499. The implication then is that these different ethno-linguistic communities speak different languages, celebrate their local traditions in their own unique ways, and maintain certain traditional rites which distinguish them from the rest of Nigeria. In that sense, it is not out of place that different Nigerian communities have specific and unique ways of celebrating their marriages, burial rites, child naming ceremonies, etc. (Uchendu, 1965; Awoyemi, et al, 1991; Obeta, 1996; Iwunna, 2011).

The significance is that when children learn these indigenous values early enough, moral decadence among children and families get reduced. Criminality and abuse of values are stamped out of the

society. Moral failures among children are curtailed, while communities and families begin to take pride in the quality of sons and daughters they produce.

### **Awareness of Major Religions in Nigeria**

Social Studies educate children on the major religions which are practised in Nigeria. These are Christianity, Islam, and the African Traditional Religion. It is these three religions that Nigerians belong to. In this subject, children learn that majority of the peoples of northern Nigerian belong to the Islamic faith, while the majority of the populations of the southern areas are Christians. Meanwhile, African Traditional Religionists, though minute in number, could be found in all parts of Nigeria. Children also learn from this subject that while Christians worship in churches, Moslems worship in mosques. For the African Traditional Religionists, there are no specific worship centres or methods of worship. Moreover, this subject teaches them to respect peoples of other religions, and imbibe the cultures of tolerance for peoples of other faiths (Fafunwa, 1974; Awoyemi, et al, 1991).

### **Emphasis on Proper Care of the Environment**

Social Studies is one subject in the primary school curricular which provides comprehensive education to young children on environmental issues. As a core school subject, it educates young learners on the numerous techniques which could be adopted in order to maintain a clean and healthy environment at home, school, and public places. It also educates learners on the various approaches that could be applied in order to keep the human environment clean and free from unnecessary pollution.

Thus, among others, this subject emphasises on the benefits of maintaining a clean environment, most especially in the areas of sanitation and cleanliness of the environment. Guided by the lessons learnt on this subject therefore, children are motivated to translate same to their individual homes, with the effect that spread of diseases and other human ailments are curtailed, while the root causes of illnesses are eliminated. By that, the cultures of environmental friendliness are promoted, while children become active partakers

in the activities of environmental cleanliness. By that, families are spared from the traumas of spending their scarce economic resources in the treatment of environmental related sickness and ailments (Awoyemi, et al, 1991; Obeta, 1996; Njoku, 1999).

### **Knowledge of Nigeria's Natural Resources**

Another crucial area of empowerment which children take home from the teaching and learning of Social Studies is on the subject of Nigeria's natural resources. As a country which is naturally enriched by God, this subject exposes learners to the full knowledge of the various natural resources which are abundantly available in various parts of the country. It teaches them that Nigeria is a country located within the tropics along the Gulf of Guinea, on the west coast of the African Continent. She occupies a geographical area of 237768.64 square kilometres, and prides an estimated population of almost 200 million (Federal Ministry of Information & Culture, 1997).

In the areas of natural resources therefore, this subject teaches young children in primary schools that Nigeria is heavily endowed with huge amounts of petroleum, natural gas, gold, diamond, cocoa, coffee, water, land, wood, coal, precious stone, iron ore, columbite, etc. Children learn that it is on the availability of these resources that Nigeria's economy lies, which in effect positions Nigeria among the wealthiest nations in the world. Income generated from these resources are used in the funding of development projects all over the country, which include the funding of schools, construction of roads, establishment of hospitals and healthcare services, as well as the supply of telecommunication services in parts of the country, etc (Ilesanmi & Ilesanmi, 1991).

### **Conclusion**

There is no doubt that the future of Nigeria depends on the quality of education the younger generations receive at school. If the younger generation of Nigerians are empowered with the appropriate quality of education they require for life, their resilience and innate willingness to contribute to family, community, and national development could be made feasible. Armed with the appropriate educational curricular contents, young school leavers

could be endowed with the desired skills that energize them to mature into strong nation builders who would be willing to make whatever commitments that may be required to make Nigeria grow steadily in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. Equipped with sound and forward-looking educational contents, young learners could begin early enough to imbibe the appropriate spirits of patriotism, national development, and commitment to the unity of the nation. As the building blocks of the future nation therefore, supporting them with the appropriate educational curricular contents has become imperative. To that end, the educational curricular must be tailored to navigate young learners appreciate their positions as the future of the nation, as well as arm them with the intellectual skills to shoulder such an enormous responsibility. Guided by these principles, the post-civil war governments in Nigeria were able to maintain a united nation, despite the numerous challenges which shook the very foundations of the nation's unity, and attempted to destroy the cords of oneness which held the entire nation together.

### **The Way Forward**

Having come to this stage in this work, it is considered relevant to make possible suggestions which could enhance the quality and curricular contents of this essential primary school subject in Nigeria. At that, it is considered relevant that the educational curricular on Social Studies be reviewed regularly. This could guide the subject fulfil its expected objectives of supporting the country's young learners acquire the relevant rich knowledge they require for life, most especially in the areas of empowering young learners with the knowledge to meet the numerous challenges militating against Nigeria's march towards the attainment of genuine national development. To that end, it becomes crucial that teachers and handlers of this subject at school should be supported to undertake regular training and re-training programs in order to equip them with the relevant professional skills needed to handle the curricular contents of this subject appropriately. Thus, it becomes quintessential then that the curricular contents of this subject be strengthened enough to instil stronger sense of patriotism, national consciousness, and 'Nigerianness' into young learners in primary schools. Without

doubts, these objectives could be attained with ease once Social Studies is elevated to the status of a compulsory subject for all students in primary and secondary schools all over the country's school system

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