

Social Studies in the Nigeria School Curriculum: A Case of Unmet Expectations?

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Introduction

When we say that education is the most potent instrument for societal transformation, the concept of education implies the effective utilization of the various school subjects taught in our schools of which social studies is one.

The central objectives of social studies teaching is the promotion of better citizenship. The pursuit of this objective starts at the primary school as the subject focuses on the home, the school and local communities. At the junior and senior secondary high schools the emphasis on good citizenship is confirmed so that it can be extended beyond the immediate local environment towards national and global responsible citizenship. The end objective remains the cultivation of good citizenship. This objective is not achieved without patient study and active participation in a social environment.

It is the intention of this paper to examine the mission of social studies in the school curriculum in the light of the extent to which the goals of teaching it have been or are being reviewed. On the basis of our conclusion, we shall suggest what to do to achieve better functionality for the implementation of the social studies curriculum in the Nigerian educational system.

Social studies in the school curriculum

The Mombasa Conference of 1968 endorsed social studies as a nascent school subject with a unique mission in Africa. That mission among other things was to enable every school going child in Africa to understand people's interactions with their social, cultural, and physical environments, appreciate home and heritage, develop skills and attitudes expected of citizens and learn to express ideas in many ways (Maryfield and Muterbi 1991). The new subject was a reaction to the traditional isolated subjects in the social sciences family like geography, history, civics, inherited from the colonial which failed to address the needs of the nation (Mbaba and Omabe, 2012). Ideally, social studies should be localized to serve the needs of the immediate community environment where it is being studied and it ought to target the solution of specific needs. As Awhen, Edinyang and Ibuole (2014) quoting Endyang and Uba (2013) observed, social studies was introduced in British schools after the First and Second World Wars as a solution to the social disorientation occasioned by these wars; thus, the subject had a mission. It was not arbitrarily introduced into the school curriculum as an end in itself. It was to be a means of achieving societal stability, control and discipline.

Alberta (2000) wrote that social studies had come to be accepted as a school subject that should assist students to acquire the basic knowledge, skills and positive attitudes needed to become responsible citizens and contributing members of society.

Similar opportunity greeted and heralded the arrival of social studies in the Nigerian school curriculum as a result of which it was seen as one quick solution to many of our social ills. Grab, Singh, Yusuf and Said (2012) listed some expected dividends of social studies education to include the cultivation in the learners of the spirit of self-confidence, power of imagination and resourcefulness, desire for continuous learning, sense of compassion for the less fortunate, respect for and tolerance of other, opinions, spirit of cooperation, participation, interdependence, open mindedness, honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, diligence and obedience, national consciousness and patriotism.

Expectedly, the hopes on social studies are extremely high. If indeed the subject could achieve all the above listed, then we as a nation are on the path of irreversible greatness. Perhaps those expectations explain why social studies is studied at all levels of our educational system primary, secondary and university.

The social studies curriculum in the Nigeria primary and secondary schools adopt the spiral curriculum organization approach whereby the same topics are repeated at higher levels in more complex forms in subsequent years.

That is the structure of the social studies curriculum which studies man in his physical and social environment in such a way that as the years progress the content becomes more complex and more challenging as well as more universal, extending from the home, community, state, nation and the wider world. The idea is to ultimately produce persons who become citizens of the entire world, persons who live and interact

responsibility in the physical and social environments, persons that demonstrate appreciation of value, for human lives and property, persons who are law abiding, tolerate of others viewpoints, respect and protect the rights of all and sundry, persons who are respectful, obedient and are prepared to contribute meaningfully to societal development.

Social studies as a school subject is expected to cultivate persons who respect and use the physical environment responsibly, preserve and respect our institutions, contribute to the economic development of the state and nation as a whole, associate very cordially and respectfully with persons from other ethnic nationalities than theirs, preserve and are proud of our cultural heritage, love our country such that they can make the supremesacrifice in defense and protection of our land/country and share common citizenship with the rest of the world.

How Successful Has Social Studies Been In Achieving The Expected Objectives

Since the main objective of social studies is the production of responsible citizens, the assessment of the subject is the measure of the quality of responsible citizens we have in the country among those who went through the social studies curriculum.

We can safely conclude that since the subject was introduced into the school curriculum about fifty years ago, most of the present leaders of our country went through the curriculum at various stages in their academic career. If the assumption is correct the question arises as to how those Nigerians who went through the curriculum have performed as good citizens of the country.

Starting from the leadership of the country at all levels- federal, state and local government what evidences are there to show that the leaders were properly tutored in the ideals of good citizenship. The stories we read about concerning corruption at all levels of governance, the looting of the nations treasury by those who have access to it at the federal and state government levels, the selfishness of leaders who amass wealth illegally at the expense of the poor masses, the failure to pay salaries and pensions to deserving public/civil servants and the diversion of such funds to selfish ends, the insensitivity of these leadership to the plight of the destitute and desperate Nigerians, the disorientation of the youths who are used by the political class as thugs in order to gain political power and the supply of hard drugs and illegal fire arms to the youths by politicians for the purpose of gaining political power, the lists unending. Both the political class and the youths all passed through the primary and secondary schools where they studied social studies meant to make them good citizens.

Among the led, we hear and read about volatile groups in various sections of the country- militants in the Niger Delta areas, the Biafra agitators in the South Eastern parts of the country, agitators for the Oduduwa State in the West of the country and the cattle rustlers in the northern parts of Nigeria. Among the business class, there are the importation of fake or substandard drugs and other products, excessive profiteering, cheating and evasion of government taxation and the like.

Among the civil and public servants, in fact the governor cannot succeed in stealing public funds without the expert advice of the civil servants. The senior civil servants know how to misappropriate government property, government lands etc. They prepare and inflate the budgets and provide for themselves what to steal. All the three tiers of government the executive, legislative and judiciary all are guilty one way or the other of corrupt practices. All these persons went through the social studies curriculum at one stage or the other.

In the light of the above can we correctly assert that the social studies curriculum has successfully fulfilled its mission or objective of producing good citizens in Nigeria? The obvious answer is a capital NO.

We shall however be unfair if we put the whole blame on social studies. It is expected in function in collaboration with all other school subjects of the social science to produce good citizens. In fact, those other subjects from which subject matter is drawn to constitute social studies should equally be held responsible for the failure of social studies to deliver on its mandate of producing good citizen in Nigeria.

Whether we blame social studies in isolation of other subjects or we hold responsible all other subjects in the social science family, I believe our conclusion is that the subjects as/have failed in producing for Nigeria the type of responsible citizens we envisioned when the subject was introduced into the school curriculum. What could be the explanation? Where do we put the blame? Do we blame the nature of subject matter selected? Do we blame the teachers who implemented the curriculum through teaching and examining the students? Do we blame the examination bodies who focused largely on assessing the acquisition of facts by the students? Do we blame government which allowed periods of strike actions that prevented effective teaching and learning? Do we blame the wider society that sponsored and encourage examination malpractices in the schools? Or do we blame everyone for not doing enough to ensure that effective, enduring and sustainable teaching and learning took place?.

I believe that the blame should be put more on the curriculum planners than on anyone else.

Why social studies failed to achieve its objectives

I believe that the study of every school subject should lead to the achievement of such goals as knowledge of subject matter acquisition of relevant skills, cultivate, or appropriate values and attitudes. Incidentally, most curriculum workers emphasize the acquisition of knowledge by prescribing an array of topics to be covered within a specified period and directing on how the assessment should be conducted to determine how much students have learnt. Very little if anything is said about the skills, values and attitudes to be cultivated in the learners, as well as how these should be assessed.

The curriculum workers know that the affective learning outcomes such as attitudes and values are difficult to measure and so not much is said about them. Teachers are hardly taught how to teach for the cultivation of sustainable values and attitude. As a result they tend to ignore the teaching for values and attitudes. They also hardly assess the acquisition of values for obvious reasons.

Knowledge of facts and principles can easily be measured through paper and pencil tests and that is what the internal and external examination bodies emphasize. These are what the certificates emphasize the grade of pass or failure measured by the scores recorded by the student on the cognitive oriented examination system.

The teachers and students know what answer would earn a passing or failing grade. The teachers teach for the students to pass very well and they even do a lot of illegal and unethical things to support students to pass well in the cognitive tests. Unknown to the teachers, the unethical things they do such as supporting examination malpractice and other forms of cheating, contradict the affective aspect of the goal of good citizenship which social studies seeks to achieve. The result is that the teachers and students move one-step forward in cognitive learning and two steps backward in affective learning. The products of the school may therefore pass very well and graduate in flying colours academically but fail woefully in the moral content of the school subjects. That explains why our society is as corrupt even when we are led by persons who supposedly passed through the social studies curriculum.

What then is the way forward?

It seems to me that we have all along made and have continued to make a serious mistake of misguided focus in our social studies curriculum focus as well as in the scope of learning in the subject. We have erroneously assumed that the study of more content will automatically lead to the all – important cultivation of skills and attitudes. Thus even when we do not spell out in specific terms the particular skills and competencies that the subject needs to cultivate, we assume that the development of the skills is automatic. There we get it wrong.

Colette Benneth (2018) observed that in 2013, the National Council for the College, Career, and Civil Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies stated standards, also known as C3 framework. The implementation of the framework seeks to enhance the rigor of the social studies disciplines using the skills of critical thinking, problem solving and participation. According to the NCSS, “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 citizen of a cultural diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world”

To meet the above purpose, the frameworks encourages student’s inquiry. In every dimension of the social studies curriculum, there is an inquiry, a seeking or a request for truth, information or knowledge in economics, civics, history, and geography components’ of the subject, there is required inquiry.

Students must engage in a pursuit of knowledge through questions. They must first prepare their questions and plan their inquiries because they are the traditional tools of research. They must evaluate their sources and evidence before they communicate their conclusion or take informed actions. There are specific skills outlined below that can support the inquiry process.

1. Critical Analysis of Primary and Secondary sources

While students need to differentiate between primary and secondary sources, they more importantly need the ability to evaluate the sources. Instead of memorizing historical facts; students evaluate the trustworthiness of multiple perspectives on historical issues and learn to make historical claims backed by documentary evidence. Students at every grade level should have the critical reasoning skills that are necessary to analyze the author’s intention and identify bias when it exists.

2. Interpreting Visual and audio sources

Information today presented visually in various formats in digital programme allows visual data to be shared or reconfigured easily. Students need to have the skills to read and interpret information in multiple formats since data can be organized in different ways. Tables use numerals or non-numerals data that are set in vertical columns so that the data may be emphasized, compared or contrasted.

Graphics or charts are pictures used to make factseasier for a child to understand. Various types of graphs include bar graphs, line, pie charts, and pictograph.

“Ability to create, evaluate and effectively utilize information, media and technology”isa related goal. This means that students need to develop the skills that allow them to learn in real-world 21st century contacts. They need to train to access and evaluate evidence from the digital world before forming their own conclusions.

The digital world may be in form of visual or audio sources or audio sources or data. Whatever the form students must develop the skills to access and evaluate them before use.

3. Understanding Timelines:

Timelines are useful tools in assisting students connect the disparate bits of information that they learn in social studies classes. Sometimes they can lose perspective on how events fit together in history. For example, a student studying “Our Heritage” and is told that the artifacts discovered in Igbo-Ukwu were dated back to the 9th Century AD, may not know that at the time in the context of world history, that Europe was still in the dark ages whereas the Igbo-Ukwu culture had been so developed given the quality of the bronze products of that period. It Is the use of the timelines that can place these two historical facts in proper perspective

4. Comparing and contracting skills: Comparing and contracting implies that students go beyond facts.

They must be able to synthesize information from various sources to strengthen their own critical judgment in order to determine how groups of people, texts and facts are similar or different. In developing the compare and contrasting skills, students need to focus, attention on the critical attributes (features or characteristics under investigation.This will give the student the details needed to support their position. Once students have analyzed for example) two readings in greater depth they should be able to draw conclusions and take a position in a response based on the critical attributes.

5. Cause and effect: students need to understand and communication causes and effect relationshipsin

order to show not only what happened but also why it happened in history. Students should understand that as they read a text or learn information, they should look out for such key words as “thus”“because” occurs in a vacuum and “therefore” no historical event.Each one has prior conditions and causesand each one has consequences. Therefore students need to have enough background information to be able to make informed guesses (cause) about what could happen in the future (effects).

6. Map skills: Maps are very essential in the study of social studies as they assist students appreciate the

spatial information in the most efficient way possible. Students need to understand the type of map they are looking at the to be able to use the map conventions like keys, orientation, scaleand more as outlined in the basis of map reading. Students need to move from mere understanding of the maps to being able to create maps and other graphic representations of both familiar andunfamiliar places.

From the foregoing we can easily observe why the social studies curriculum as adopted overseas in the United States, appears to be stronger, more productive and result oriented than ours in Nigeria. There the greater emphasis is on the cultivation of skills that are implicit in each of the subject from where information has been drawn to constitute the social studies subject.We can see that historical, geographical, religious, sociological, anthropological, economic etc facts are studied, not ends in themselves but as tools or instruments for the cultivation of skills and competencies. They realized that facts or information areobsolescent. They can easily be forgotten or become stale or obsolete.Facts of today may become fictions of tomorrow.Asresult the learning of facts should, not constitute the sole purpose of social studies. That could explain even if in part, why all the facts of social studies learnt by Nigerian leaders and their followers are hardly ever remembered soon after they leave the school environments.

In more civilized nations, educationists encourage the cultivation of more enduring learning outcomes skills.Perhaps another example from the United States will suffice to make the point stronger.Public schools of North Carolina (2006) categorically state that in all social studies courses knowledge and skills depend upon and enrich each other while emphasizingthe potential connections and application. In addition to the skills specific to social studies there are skills that generally enhance students attitude to learn to make decisions and to develop as competent, self-directed citizens that can be all the more meaningful when used and developed within the context of social studies. It is important that students be exposed to a continuum of skills development from kindergarten through the secundar school level. As theyencounter and reencounter these

coreskills in a variety of environments and contents that are intellectually and developmentally appropriate, their competency in using them increases. Below is an example of skill competency goals for K-12 in North Carolina Schools.

Social Studies Skills Competence Goals: K-12

Skill competency Goal 1	The learner will acquire strategies for reading social studies materials and for increasing social studies vocabulary
	<p>Objectives</p> <p>1.01 Read for literal meaning 1.02 Summarize to select main ideas 1.03 Draw inferences. 1.04 Detect cause and effect 1.05 Recognized bias and propaganda. 1.06 Recognize and use social studies terms In written and oral report. 1.07 Distinguish facts and fiction 1.08 Use context clues and appropriate sources such as glossaries, text and dictionaries to gain meaning.</p>
Skill competency Goal 2	<p>The learner will acquire strategies to access a variety of sources and use appropriate research skills to gather, synthesizes and report information using diverse modalities to demonstrate the knowledge acquired.</p> <p>2.01 Use appropriate sources of information 2.02 Explore print and non-print materials. 2.03 Utilize different types of technology. 2.04 utilize community-related resources such as field trips, guest speakers and interviews. 2.05 Transfer information from one medium to another such as written to visual and statistical to written. 2.06 Create written, oral, musical, Visual and theatrical presentations of social studies information.</p>
Skill competency Goal 3	<p>The learner will acquire strategies analyze, interpret, create and use resources and materials.</p> <p>Objectives</p> <p>3.01 Use map and globe reading skills. 3.02 Interpret graphs and charts. 3.03 Detect bias. 3.04 Interpret social and political messages of cartoons. 3.05 Interpret history through artifacts, arts, and media.</p>
Skill competency Goal 4	<p>The learner will acquire strategies needed for applying decision-making and problem-solving techniques both orally and writing to historic, contemporary and controversial world issues.</p> <p>Objectives</p> <p>4.01 Use hypothetical reasoning processes. 4.02 Examine, understanding and evaluate conflicting viewpoints. 4.03 Recognized and analyze values upon which judgments are made. 4.04 Apply conflict resolutions. 4.05 predict possible outcomes. 4.06 Draw conclusions. 4.07 Offer solutions. 4.08 Develop hypothesis.</p>
Skill competency Goal 5	<p>The learner will acquire strategies needed for effective incorporation of computer technology in the learning process.</p> <p>Objectives</p> <p>5.01 Use word processing to create, format and produce classroom assignment/projects. 5.02 Create and modify a database for class assignments.</p>

	<p>5.03 Create, modify and use spread sheet to examine real-world problems.</p> <p>5.04 Create non-linear projects related to the social studies context area via multimedia presentations.</p>
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From the foregoing, we can see that elsewhere, educationists and educators appreciate the indispensability of skills cultivation as an integral part of the social studies curriculum. In Nigeria, we lay emphasis on knowledge which when forgotten the products of the social studies curriculum are as good as if they never attended any school at all. This explains why the impact of the subject is not felt in the life of the consumer of the curriculum.

We would therefore recommend that the focus on relevant skills be taken very seriously in our schools system and in the minds of our curriculum workers. It is important for the Nigeria teachers to accept the practicability of teaching for the acquisition of relevant and appropriate skills right from the kindergarten through the tertiary level where the subject is taught and studied.

As we know in the practice of curriculum development, the age or developmental status of the learner would normally determine the complexity of skill to prescribe and expose the said learner to. Thus we need to shift emphasis from the near total focus on knowledge content of social studies to schools consideration of skills as vital learning goals/objectives in the social studies curriculum.

In giving effect to the ideal of shifting our curricular focus towards the acquisition of relevant and appropriate skills, we challenge our curriculum workers to as a matter of urgency, constitute teams of subject experts not only in social studies but also in those subjects from where social studies derives its subjects matter. These subject teams should undertake an analysis of the skills that are implied or embedded in each of the school subjects from the simplest to the most complex, as a basis for prescribing the skills that are appropriate for various class levels. This classification will then form the basis for curriculum workers in determining and recommending what skills to be taught to what class level of the social studies subject.

Values in social studies curriculum

One of the expectations on social studies is the inculcation of right values that will make the learners responsible citizens. If values were properly taught and adequately cultivated in our citizens, perhaps our society should have been more disciplined. The indicators of moral bankruptcy we witness in our society today appears to be making the statement that social Studies and all other subjects that ought to be teaching moral values have failed to achieve their expected mandate.

The issue of values education is one that should be handled very cautiously. Although our National Policy on Education consistently stresses the importance of the right type of values (FRN 2013) Sharp (2012) discovered that values education can inadvertently degenerate into indoctrination or unreasonable acceptance of views, and asserts that the teacher's responsibility is to convey the content of the subject area to the students in a most comprehensible manner and not to teach values. Johnson (2004) and Englund (2006) observed that general values like justice, fairplay, honesty and patriotism will be confused with personal values if values are taught in social studies education. This fact becomes more obvious in a pluralistic society such as Nigeria where the population is dichotomized along ethnic, religious political and socio-economic lines. Perceptions about values such as those listed above are bound to differ according to each group's feeling "One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter."

Value education in social studies is an in-built feature in the subject which all teachers are expected to strive to achieve in spite of the criticism against the teaching of values using the subject. It would appear easy to conclude that once we teach social studies we must automatically identify the values. It calls for a very serious and committed teacher to be able to identify the values to strive to inculcate.

We have already observed that values may be differently interpreted by persons whose perception may be biased by ethnic, religious or socio-economic sentiments. However it cannot be denied that social studies is a heavily value-laden subject. Through it, we should teach and have students learn core democratic values of a nation, promotion of human relations skills and students' self-concept, development of students' Socio-political and moral insight, development of tolerant attitude towards other people's views and actions, and many others. Taylor (2006) describes value education as a wide gamut of learning and activities ranging from training in physical health, mental hygiene, etiquette and manners, appropriate social behavior, civic rights and duties to aesthetic and even religious training.

It is not in doubt at all that the mission of social studies includes the cultivation of sound values. The problem in the attainment of the objective lies in the teachers' inability or reluctance to teach for the inculcation of the said values. The reasons include the fact that values are not assessed using paper and pencil test; and the teachers are not trained in the art of consciously teaching for the affective outcomes of their subjects. Although they write lesson notes and often include affective objectives as part of the expected learning outcomes, hardly

do they consciously teach for the inculcation of values. The teachers are rather desirous of covering the syllabus so that the students will pass well in their internal and external examinations.

As we all know, students learn the way they are examined. They study according to how they see their examination question papers. If the question papers call for memorization of specific facts, the students study in ways that facilitate the memorization of facts. If on the other hand questions are asked on values, they will respond cognitively- to pass the examination even if their response may not accord with their real behavior.

We therefore advise that teachers need to be reoriented to create time and teach students to cultivate right values even if the said values are not examinable. Every teacher should always challenge himself/herself with the questions: "Apart from the information I am teaching the pupils/students, how I can use the information to make them better citizens, starting from the home, school, community, state, nation and to the wider world?" "What moral lesson(s) can be derived from the subject matter being taught the learners?" "In addition to passing their examinations, what shall I add to the learning so that the children turn out to become better behaved or more refined products?"

In asking them these questions, teachers should remember that there are **moral** values, **social** values, **economic** values, **political** values, **spiritual** values, **family life** values, etc. Depending on the subject/topic being taught and the class/nature of learners (bearing in mind their developmental status) the teachers should know how best to present the lessons in order to achieve the desired goal. The younger the learners, the simpler the nature of the values. We caution however that teachers should not indoctrinate but intelligently guide learners to appreciate the necessity of living decent lives implied in the value being taught.

Conclusion

Social studies as a school subject in the Nigerian school curriculum has come of age. The expectations on the subject as a panacea for all societal ills in Nigeria appears a bit over-ambitious. If the curriculum of the subject has failed to achieve the expected mandate, the blame belongs to several quarters including the following:

- **The curriculum planners:** who failed to adequately stress the relative importance of skills vis-à-vis knowledge and values, but rather gave too much prominence to knowledge or content/subject matter;
- **Teachers:** who focus most of the efforts on teaching for the acquisition of knowledge for the purpose of passing examinations only without corresponding attention to cultivation of skills and values
- **Training institutions:** which fail to train teachers in the art of teaching for the cultivation of skills and values, but rather focused on training for the transfer of theoretical knowledge.
- **Time-table planners:** Who fail to provide sufficient time for the study or teaching of skills and values in social studies classes.
- **The examination system-** that provides mainly for the assessment of cognitive and learning outcomes and neglects the affective domain of learning outcomes.
- **Textbooks authors:** who, in writing social studies books, focus most of the attention on the acquisition of subject matter information and give little or no attention to the process of acquiring the necessary skills and values implied in the study of social studies.
- **The wider society:** that has kept quiet all long without taking steps to criticize the lack of balance in the curriculum focus between the emphasis on knowledge and on skills, and values.

I believe that it is not too late for us to revise things. That is the whole essence of curriculum review and revision. We can start today to initiate a process of analyzing the skills and values embedded in the study of the social studies curriculum at all levels. That analysis will reveal all the relevant skills and values that ought to be inculcated in the learners. On the basis of the developmental status of the learners, the said skills and values are prescribed for the various grade levels where the subject is studied.

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