
ENHANCING NIGERIA'S DEVELOPMENT AND CAPACITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL STUDIES

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Abstract

The twenty first century is bringing new developmental challenges to Nigeria, such as: to produce responsible citizens, build social cohesion, increase economic productivity, engage in democratic participation and ensure sustainable national transformation. The purpose of this paper is to look at the role of Social Studies teaching in the development and capacity building of Nigeria in the modern times. The study addresses the role of Social Studies in the improvement of human capacity to facilitate democratic values, social responsibility, peaceful co-existence and informed decision making. It also identifies and discusses key issues that hinder the execution of effective Social Studies in Nigeria such as poor instructional materials, poor policy support, inadequate teacher training and constraints in the course of delivering the Social Studies curriculum. The paper concludes that the improvement of Social Studies is very important for the development of knowledge, attitude and skill of citizens needed for sustainable development and national development in Nigeria of the twenty-first Century.

Keywords: Social Studies, National advancement, Capacity building, Citizenship education, Nigeria

Introduction

Technological development, globalisation, transition to democracy, environmental issues and demand for human capital development are features of the twenty first century. Not only is there expected growth in the economy, but nations around the globe are also expected to grow citizens who are informed, responsible, innovative and socially committed. Development for a developing nation such as Nigeria is not just about physical infrastructure, economic growth and development but also about building national values, civic responsibility, peace building and human capacity.

Education continues to be one of the most powerful tools to accomplish these objectives. Social Studies has a special place as it reminds the relationship of man and society. It aims to build up students who are aware of social realities, have an appreciation of diversity, are analytical in their thinking and are active members of the national life. Social Studies is hence still relevant to the development and capacity building of Nigeria.

The 21st century is a period of opportunity and challenges for Nigeria as a nation. The country has tremendous human and natural resources; a youthful population; cultural diversity and considerable economic potential. The country has tremendous human resources, youthful population, cultural diversity and considerable economic potential. However, the prevailing problems including unemployment, insecurity, corruption, low civic values, social disintegration, and low human capacity continue to be a challenge to the development of the nation. All these points to the fact that Nigeria's sustainable development should not be solely dependent on economic reforms and technological growth. It also involves the intentional development of citizens with knowledge, social responsibility, a critical attitude, and dedication to the common good of society (Yusuf, 2020).

Education continues to be one of the greatest means for accomplishing this objective. Education impacts values, attitudes, skills and social behaviour as well as academic knowledge. Social Studies has a special position in this educational system. Social Studies is an

interdisciplinary subject that focusses on human relationships, citizenship, social institutions and social issues with the aim of equipping students for effective functioning in society. It provides people with the knowledge, attitudes and competencies to comprehend social reality, to value cultural diversity, to be problem solvers and to be responsible decision makers.

Social Studies in the Nigerian context came in basically to inculcate the values of national unity, citizenship education, peaceful co-existence, value re-orientation and so on. These objectives are very appropriate for the 21st century. It is important that Social Studies is defined as a platform for promoting citizens' civic competence and social responsibilities which are essential for sustainable national development in a time when Nigeria is striving to develop a democratic culture, promote national integration and build human capacity (Akinlaye, 2021). The main purpose of this paper is to assess the role of Social Studies to twenty first century development and human capacity building of Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarifications

Development is not only economic growth but is a multifaceted and broad concept. Development, in the modern context, is a process of overall development of a society in economic, social, political, cultural and institutional aspects. This relates to positive improvement in citizens' quality of life as a result of improvements in education, health, social justice, productivity, infrastructure, democratic participation and improved standard of living (Todaro & Smith, 2021).

Capacity is the knowledge, skills, values, competencies and institutional capabilities that allow individuals and institutions to function effectively and to bring about the desired results. Capacity refers to the human and institutional resources of a nation that enable it to meet social, political, economic and technological needs. Human capacity especially is connected to the enhancement of citizens with critical thinking ability, problem solving skill, creative ability, civic competence and ethical responsibility. Capacity, on the other hand, is

related to the developmental goals achieved by the effectiveness of systems, policies, leadership, and organizations, at the institutional level.

Twenty first century development is multi-dimensional. It is not just about economic growth; also, about social progress, democratic stability, cultural integration, environmental sustainability, and enhancement of citizens' quality of life. A country can be considered developing country if it has positive change in its institutions, human welfare, productivity and social relations. Development and capacity go hand in hand. Development depends on the intellectual, moral and civic capacities of its citizens to meaningfully contribute to national development.

Social Studies is a multidisciplinary subject that depends on content from the disciplines of political science, anthropology, history, political science, geography and other social sciences. It is mainly concerned with the study of man with respect to their physical and social settings. Social Studies instruction is not simply about the passing down of knowledge but is a goal which helps students become responsible citizens. It seeks to develop social awareness, moral values, critical thinking, problem-solving ability, and civic responsibility.

Based on the function of Social Studies in society, Akinlaye (1997), was of the view that, the main point to be noted from the descriptions is that Social Studies is related to how man lives in his physical and social environment (town, city or village) and how he relates with others (colleagues, family, teachers, friends and so on) in his/her everyday activities. Thus, he was able to link the function of Social Studies to the Nigerian society and its national goals as revealed in the five (5) national goals of Nigeria, as they are directed towards national development by establishing: a distinguished and vibrant economy; a balanced and democratic society; a land of positive and full prospects for all citizens; a liberated and classless society; an amalgamated, passionate and independent nation

Objectives of Social Studies

The objectives of Social Studies in Nigeria was drawn from the National Educational objectives which are in harmony with the objectives of the National Policy on Education that encourages: the preparation of the mind in the perception of the world around them; the inculcation of national consciousness and national unity; the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competences with mental and physical environment for people to live in and contribute to the enhancement of the society and the instilling of the right type of attitudes and values for the existence of the individual and the Nigerian society (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2003).

In the pre-primary level of education, the following are the objectives of Social Studies; inculcating social norms, through effective process of socialization built on that which has began at home; inculcating in the children the spirit of examination of local environment and nature, for instance knowing the available objects and their uses; teaching co-operation and team spirit, the child sees himself as a part of the whole and not a whole in the group, and developing national consciousness through acquaintances with national symbols such as the National Anthem, the Pledge, the National Flag and the Coat of Arms. The contents of Social Studies at this level of development in the child creates a conscious mind needed for socialization.

In the primary school, the following are the objectives of Social Studies; to build up the appropriate citizenship to effectively participate and contribute in the life of the society; instilling ethical and character education, and emerging good attitude and values; creating in the child the appreciation of man's dignity and liberty; showing kindness and friendship towards those less fortunate in society; developing sense of forbearance and reverence of the opinions of others even in disagreement and accepting change that is needed (FRN, 2004).

At the tertiary level, the objectives of Social Studies include: instilling of National awareness and National harmony; instilling of the right type of values and attitudes necessary for the existence of the individual (citizen) and the Nigerian society, the way of educating the

mind in the knowledge of what is happening around; attainment of dexterities & abilities mental, hand and head, which are necessary for the person to live effectively, enhance the development of the society.

A review of all the objectives of Social Studies from the pre-primary to tertiary levels in Nigeria indicates that the subject is aimed at inculcating social norms, through effective process of socialization built on that which has been taught at home and leading the child to develop that spirit of analysis and creative thinking through survey of their immediate environment and the world around him/her.

Social Studies as a Tool for National Development

Social Studies contributes to national development in several important ways. First, it promotes citizenship education. Sustainable national development depends on citizens who understand their rights, responsibilities, and obligations to society. Social Studies helps learners develop patriotism, civic consciousness, respect for law, and commitment to the common good. Second, it encourages national unity and social integration. In a culturally diverse country like Nigeria, Social Studies provides learners with knowledge about cultural differences, tolerance, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence. This helps to promote social harmony and national unity. Third, Social Studies is an enabler for value re-orientation. Values are strongly connected with many of Nigeria's developmental problems like corruption, indiscipline, intolerance and substandard civic culture. Social Studies fosters the values of honesty, responsibility, the sense of integrity, cooperation and accountability. Fourth, it increases the participation of citizens in the democratic process. Social Studies helps students understand governance, leadership, participating in elections, human rights and public accountability. These are key to democratic development and nation-building.

Social Studies and Human Capacity Building

Social Studies is essential in shaping the capacities of humans to function effectively in society; it is a process that develops intellectual, social and emotional competencies in human beings. Human capacity building is the enhancement of individual attitudes, values, knowledge and skills to make them useful in their personal and

social life. In this aspect, Social Studies is a subject that foundational for learning, not only in achieving good academic success, but also in becoming responsible citizens and active participants in national life. A notable feature of the Social Studies curriculum, and its contribution to human capacity building, is the cultivation of critical thinking. Students develop skills in examining social issues, assessing evidence, weighing opinions, and making decisions. This is important in a complex society like Nigeria where citizens are always faced with a multitude of problems of political, economic and social nature that call for a good sense of judgment.

Use of Social Studies also fosters communication and interpersonal skills – human capacities are essential. Students learn how to articulate their thoughts and ideas clearly, listen to others, and participate in social interaction in a thoughtful way through group conversations, debates, role play and group learning. In the workplace, in governance and in community life these skills are essential. The next is the acquisition of problem solving and decision-making skills. In the field of Social Studies, students come across various issues in society which include poverty, corruption, environmental degradation, insecurity, cultural conflicts, and so on. Through addressing these issues, learners are encouraged to think of solutions to the problem and have a sense of responsibility towards the improvement of society (Akinlaye, 2021).

Moreover, education in Social Studies helps students become good citizens and leaders. It provides students with information on governance and democratic processes, human rights and civic duties. This equips them to join wholeheartedly in leadership and community development activities. Besides that, Social Studies helps in value formation and ethical development as well. It encourages honesty and integrity, tolerance and respect for diversity, cooperation and social justice. These values are fundamental in the emerging of a responsible and productive citizen to national sustainable development (Yusuf, 2020). Social Studies, thus, is an effective vehicle for the development of human capacities in these dimensions, which in turn will equip students to be effective citizens, workers and members of society.

Relevance of Social Studies to Contemporary Nigeria

The social, political and economic dynamics of Nigeria are complex and the study of Social Studies has a significant relevance to Nigeria today. Nigeria is a country of tremendous diversity in terms of ethnic groups, religion, languages and cultural practices. This diversity, though an asset, has also been a source of problem of ethnic tension, political instability and social conflict. Social Studies teaching is designed to tackle these challenges and foster national unity, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence.

Citizenship education is one such field of significance. In a democratic society, citizens need to know their rights, duties and responsibilities. Social Studies offers students information on how to govern, how it is governed and how they can become involved. This is a good way to enhance democratic culture and low voter turnout in the society (Yusuf, 2020). Also, social issues such as corruption and indiscipline can be tackled using Social Studies. Ethical issues in both public and private sectors remain a challenge in Nigeria. SS education also helps students to develop moral values, accountability and integrity which are needed to curb corruption and good governance.

In addition, Social Studies performs a fundamental function in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. The Nigeria of today has been witness to a range of insecurity such as communal conflict, insurgency, and political violence. Social Studies enables pupils to learn about the causes of conflict and the contribution of dialogue, negotiation and peaceful co-existence. This helps in creating an even more harmonious and stable society. The other one is economic consciousness and productivity. Social Studies introduces students to some fundamental economic ideas like entrepreneurship, allocation of resources and productivity. This is important especially in the context of youth unemployment and self-reliance in Nigeria.

In addition, Social Studies is conducive to national integration and national identity. It helps develop learners' knowledge and understanding of the history, culture and values of other ethnic groups, encouraging respect for others and a sense of national identity. This is very critical to promoting unity in a diverse nation such as Nigeria.

Last but not least, Social Studies gives a learner a sense of global issues like climate change, migration, digital citizenship, international relations, and so on, in the context of globalization and technological advancement. This equips Nigerian citizens for optimal participation in the world today (UNESCO, 2024).

Challenges Facing Social Studies in Nigeria

Social Studies in Nigeria is beset with a number of problems, despite its relevance. Lack of teaching materials is one of the major problems. Teaching materials, textbooks, and maps, as well as digital tools and materials from the community, are resources that are not available in many schools for effective teaching. A second problem is a lack of teacher preparation. Some teachers responsible for conducting Social Studies in schools may not have special training in Social Studies, thus impacting the depth and quality of the Social Studies lessons. The implementation gap of the curriculum also exists. While Social Studies is a very important area for development, teaching is often undermined in its implementation by exam-focused teaching, overcrowding, and lack of practical involvement. Another challenge is lack of policy support and funding. If teachers are not trained, and curricula are not upgraded, the full developmental potential of Social Studies cannot be achieved without sustained investments. The critical challenges of resource limitations, teacher competency and policy support have been consistently noted in recent research on Social Studies implementation in Nigeria.

The Prospective of Social Studies for Nigeria's Development and Capacity

In Nigeria, Social Studies has tremendous potentials for the development and capacity building. Citizenship formation and democratic consolidation is one big prospect. Social Studies helps students to learn their rights, responsibilities and obligations as citizens of the society. With the ongoing development of democratic governance in Nigeria, Social Studies can play a function in the creation of civically engaged citizens in an informed way to exercise their electoral, governance, and citizenship rights and responsibilities (Yusuf, 2020). National unity and social cohesion is another key prospect.

Indeed, deliberate efforts to promote tolerance, peaceful co-existence and mutual respect should be made in Nigeria due to the diversity of ethnic, religious, and cultural groups living together. Social Studies teaching brings the values of cooperation, dialogue and national integration out to the learners and helps to minimize social tension and promote social unity. Another possible development is the training of human resources. Social Studies helps prepare young people for leadership, productivity, and responsible decision making by using problem solving, critical thinking, and communication and collaborative learning. These are crucial skills for the nation's growth in the 21st century. There are also opportunities for value re-orientation in Social Studies. Negative values in Nigeria have been linked to many of her social and developmental problems ranging from corruption and indiscipline, intolerance, lack of civic responsibility, and so on.

Social Studies is a vehicle for the development of honesty, accountability, integrity and social responsibility. Peace building and conflict resolution is also an important potential opportunity. Social Studies teaches students how to prevent conflict and to have peaceful ways of solving their social issues in a country that is insecure, has political tension and communal conflict. Last, but not least, there are good prospects for global awareness and adaptability in Social Studies. Citizens need to be able to comprehend global issues like climate change, digital citizenship, migration and sustainable development as the world gets more connected. Learning in Social Studies enables learners to function effectively in the context of the country and the world.

Conclusion

Twenty first century Nigeria is not just about economic planning and technological growth to improve national development and human capacity. It also demands the change of responsible, conversant, competent and socially engaged citizens. Social Studies learning is one of the key elements in this process. The need for sustainable development in the present times cannot be over stressed if education on Social Studies is to be strengthened, supported and strategically included in national capacity building program and plans.

Suggestions

Several practical steps are required to ensure Social Studies plays its optimal role in development and capacity building in Nigeria. Government should step up its policy support and curriculum relevance. The contemporary issues of democratic participation, peacebuilding, digital citizenship, entrepreneurship, environmental sustainability and national integration should continue to be covered in the Social Studies curriculum. Teachers should have ongoing professional development. There is a need for the teachers of Social Studies to attend regular workshops, seminars and in-service trainings to develop their pedagogical skills and enhance their way of teaching the Social Studies class. Schools should use participatory and experiential teaching. It is essential to encourage the learners to discuss, role play, undertake civic projects, be involved in community issues, social inquiries, and problem-solving, and to allow them to relate the classroom to real life social issues. There should be improved funding and instructional resources.

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