

Integrated Approach to the Teaching of Social Studies at Basic Education Level

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Abstract: Social Studies is being taught in all levels of our educational system in the country viz: primary, secondary and tertiary institutions, thus many students are developing keen interest in learning the subject. At the basic education level, Social Studies is meant to change the attitude of the children and make them responsible members of the society. The approach to the teaching of Social studies however, can make a difference in children's lives. Using documentary sources, this paper explored integrated approach to the teaching and learning of Social studies in the Basic education level; and concluded that for a desirable change to be made in the lives of the children there is the need for an integrated approach to the teaching of Social studies.

Key words: Social Studies, Integrated Approach, Basic Education

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Introduction

The introduction of Social studies was not just to foster interpersonal harmony among individuals, but to infuse in the young a love of the country thereby fostering national unity which is essential to national development. One distinguishing character of Social Studies is its deliberate focus on the problems of man, his inter-relationship with his environment and the orientation of the discipline to provide informed and practical solutions to human challenges. Social studies therefore, is of paramount concern to government.

Social studies contributes in achieving national objective by relying on its peculiar methodology like inquiry, topical, problematic, project activities and other approaches to expose the children to the pros and cons of various situation, so that they can arrive at their own independent conclusions based on reasoned judgment. Teachers' method matters as far as quality learning is concerned. How teachers and learners interact is of major concern for educational quality (Humphreys & Crawford, 2014). Succinctly, the Federal Ministry of Education (2011) noted that what teachers do, or do not do, are able or not able to do, are willing, or not willing to do, what they do properly or poorly determines, to a great extent, the effective curriculum (what pupils learn).

It is based on this understanding that integrated approach is viewed as best option for the teaching of social studies. An integrated approach to learning attempts to follow the child's

natural ways of learning, viewing the world as a whole, the teacher's role being to provide experiences and to assist the inquiry process by suggesting further lines which might be followed (Okam, 1998). Children naturally are curious. They equally see the world as a whole rather than in parts. In providing them learning experiences, efforts should be made to address these two aspects of their nature.

This paper advocates the integrated approach to the teaching of social studies at the basic education level based on the understanding of children's nature. The paper has been organized under the following sub-headings: Social Studies in Basic Education Curriculum, Integrated Approach to Teaching Social Studies, Concerns on the Use of Integrated Approach, Suggestions and Conclusion.

Social Studies in Basic Education Curriculum

The term Social Studies was first used in the United States of America (USA) in 1883, the time when curriculum innovations were being seriously advocated to reform the American system of education (Dan, 2010). Proponents of Social Studies saw the need for children to be taught knowledge as a unit in an integrated manner and not in isolated bits as it is the case with traditional separate subjects of History, Geography and Civics which were considered not enough to enable the young generation adapt and adjust to the situation and demands of a fast changing America. Thus, USA became the first country to declare Social studies as a subject in the school curriculum.

The Mombasa conference of 1968, adopted two fundamental definitions of Social studies (Dan, 2010):

- Social Studies is the integration of Social Sciences and humanities concepts for the purpose of promoting and practicing effective problem solving/ decision making citizenship skills on social, political economic issues and problems.
- Social Studies is the study of man, the way he behaves when organized in groups and his relation to physical and natural environment.

Generally, a critical observation of the above definitions is that Social studies is viewed as an integrated subject and the study of man, how he behaves in society, and how he interacts with his environment in a given period of time. In summary, Social studies can be defined as a study of man in some particular place (location) at a particular time (past, present and the future).

Social studies is studied across the three levels of Nigeria's basic education as a theme under Religion and National Values (Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council, 2014). Social studies, according to Abubakar (2013) is meant to achieve the following objectives:

- Create awareness of and sensitivity to man's environment.
- Influence man's attitudes positively to social, cultural political values and total environment.
- Enable men to acquire skills for solving societal and environmental problems.
- Equip men with the basic understanding of the knowledge of the total environment.
- Encourage voluntary participation in social and civic duties while developing the sense of responsibility.

Other roles played by social studies, according to Mezieobi (1998) in Abubakar (2013) are:

- The development of National consciousness and commitment as necessary ingredients for nation building.
- The inculcation of social value and skills for active social life

- The development of intellectual skills, knowledge and abilities for better understanding of the immediate and remote environment.
- Developing rational thinking ability for practical social life.
- Identifying and solving problems using problem solving techniques
- Promoting value awareness and utilization of some values in tackling dynamic problems in the society.

Social Studies is no longer an appendage of the Social Sciences. It has gone a long way in emerging as a distinctive area of learning. It is no longer a “hotchpotch”, a confused addition of bits and pieces of the Social Sciences and Humanities. This was sometimes referred to as “inter-disciplinary” form of teaching. Hence, an integrated approach to the teaching of social studies has been advocated.

Integrated Approach to Teaching Social Studies

Integrated approach to teaching Social studies is against the backdrop of weaknesses in teachers’ approach to teaching distinct subject like Social studies. Several studies (for example, Hardman *et al.* 2008; Davidson, 2010) reported a consistently high level of ritualized classroom interaction that makes very little cognitive demands of pupils, ‘with little attention being paid to securing pupil understanding’ (Hardman *et al.* 2008: 55). Such ritualized exchanges have been observed in many African classroom settings (Dembelé & Miaro-II 2003) and are interpreted as a coping strategy that allows teachers and pupils to save face and maintain the appearance that effective teaching and learning is taking place, while actually struggling with the academic content of lessons (Davidson, 2010).

It is further argued that many teachers are not aware of their shortcomings and the negative impact their poor teaching can have on pupil motivation, attendance and retention. Studies suggest that teachers are not particularly self-critical of their teaching (Adekola 2007; Dunne *et al.* 2013), although it may be that they are unwilling to admit their shortcomings. Most striking are the results from the 2004 Education Sector Analysis survey of primary teachers, in which only 2.5% of the sampled primary teachers accepted responsibility for the poor performance of their pupils (although arguably there was greater admission of some level of responsibility in the acceptance by around 20% that improved teaching methodology would improve matters (FME 2011). More often pupils were blamed for poor communication skills and poor classroom participation.

According to Humphreys and Crawford (2014),

Research in Nigeria suggests that there is very little variation in lesson structure across subjects or levels, with traditional didactic methods predominating. In some project-supported states there appears to be some change toward more interactive and ‘learner-centred’ teaching but robust evidence is lacking as to whether the recorded surface features of such teaching (e.g. putting pupils into groups, praising pupils or using a teaching aid) actually constitute better teaching or whether they have helped improve learning (p. vi).

Based on these unpalatable scenarios, emerging teaching methods favour a more learner-centred approach to the teaching and learning. Integrated approach is one such approaches to the effective teaching of social studies. The word integration means the act of combining two or more things to work together in harmony. In Social studies, integration refers to linking of related subjects, facts, concepts and knowledge while teaching and learning. An approach is a way of doing or going about a thing such as a task/problem. Integration advocates and utilizes the wholistic approach to teaching and learning. According to Okam, “Its structure is in line

with Gestalt theory whose slogan stipulates that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts' (p. 300). He further stated that, "An issue, a problem or a topic is best tackled by making use of appropriate knowledge for different subject disciplines. In this manner, the topic is seen as a whole. Children do not naturally observe the world from the perspectives of academic disciplines". He concluded that a child sees the world as one unit and naturally asks questions which cut across artificial subject divisions.

The new emphasis is to conceive and implement Social Studies as an integrated discipline, and to impart themes from a unified angle. Mutebi, (1994) in Dan (2010) stresses the fact that integration of concepts and themes should be organized in a scope and sequence. A scope refers to the width and depth of a particular topic or concept in Social Studies. Teachers need to gauge how wide or how deep they should teach a particular subject matter to determine how they should apply the integrated techniques in teaching. The sequence of Social Studies refers to the order or pattern or logical arrangements in which the learning material, content or syllabus is to be taught at any level. Sequencing in Social Studies means moving from topics that are near at hand to those that are faraway for the purpose of expanding the learner's knowledge of the environment (Dan, 2010). The order in which the content is presented is important in that it helps to show the possibility of integration through related topics and themes. Through this awareness of Social Studies scope and sequence, teachers have the responsibility to plan and teach appropriate content to the students. They need to help the students expand their horizons of thinking, awareness and understanding of themselves, their immediate and distant environment. This comes about if they can ably apply the integrated techniques correctly during the course of teaching and learning Social Studies.

The first step is to define concept to be treated from different angles. Answers to man's problems are wide and varied. It is all the data collected from the several sources or disciplines that are used, not just one or two sources. Usually, the teacher raises questions to guide or lead the student in making his or her inquiry, so that he or she would follow a logical line of finding out, one that could lead to a conclusion that may not have been thought of. For example, using the concept of corruption as a case, such lead questions are asked:

1. Find out the types of corruption that are common in Nigeria.
2. What factors bring them about?
3. What factors appear to be most responsible?
4. Is one factor linked to another?
5. How, in the light of 3 and 4, do we solve the problem?

Concerns on the Use of Integrated Approach

Integrated approach is effective in the teaching of social studies. There are however some concerns about this approach. One thing noticeable from teachers' perspective is that integrated approach is rigorous and difficult to define or limit the area to cover. Moreover, it is difficult to gather the material from various sources. The practice of relying on one textbook like the Social Studies module in basic education does not provide a lot of opportunities for the students to expand their knowledge.

However, the use of the integrated approach emphasizes and requires utilizing more resource books, instructional aids, and resource persons after recognizing that there may be many other practical ways of getting information or acquisition of skills within ones' environment. Unfortunately, in Nigeria's basic education, this form of teaching Social Studies is done on a limited scale and this explains why most Social Studies lessons are confined inside the classrooms.

Indeed, there is ample evidence that teachers' planning is often based on textbooks only, a suggestion that teachers often lack the interest and commitment to select suitable methods and appropriate curriculum materials (Marsh 1984). Thus, Social Studies curriculum appears to be synonymous with the body of knowledge by experts as encapsulated in a textbook. A similar observation is shared by Stodolsky (1988), who notes that a great deal of Social Studies instruction diverged from stereotypical textbooks based on recitation and lecture. Proper application of the integrated techniques could reduce such tendencies of over reliance on textbooks, cram work by students and lecture methods, which are prevalent in our schools.

Studies have confirmed the confusion in the interpretation of integrated approach. Okada (2013) examined the integrated approach of teaching Social Studies (SST) and students' learning in Primary Teachers' Colleges in Mid Northern Uganda. Four Primary Teachers' Colleges of Canon Lawrence, Loro Core, Gulu Core and Christ the King were purposively sampled for the study. The study found that confusion still exists when defining integrated approach of teaching. Besides, it was also established that the philosophy and rationale of integrated approach was not well conceived by tutors and students, and that this has negatively and significantly influenced the teaching of Social Studies. Besides, tutors and student teachers in the four colleges respectively reiterated on lack of instructional materials and the unclearly defined subject boundaries. The study therefore recommended that the Ministry of Education should reinforce effective application of integrated approach by stocking Social Studies department in Primary Teachers' Colleges with various instructional materials to promote meaningful teaching and learning of this dynamic subject. The study further recommends that the Ministry of Education should establish a mechanism for supporting tutors of Primary Teachers' Colleges through offering adequate opportunities for further regular workshops, provision of incentives, motivation and relevant reference text books to promote quality teaching and learning of Social Studies in Primary Teachers' Colleges.

Suggestions

Based on the preceding discussion, the following are suggested:

1. Teachers need training on integrated approach to teaching of social studies. This can be done through sponsorship to seminars and workshops.
2. Government and school administrators should play supportive roles to teachers engage in curriculum innovations like integrated approach. They need to provide facilities for teachers to carry on with this approach.
3. National orientation agencies should collaborate with schools in sponsoring social studies teaching and learning through the provision of facilities.

Conclusion

Social studies contributes in achieving national objective by relying on its peculiar methodology like inquiry, topical, problematic, project activities and other approaches to expose the children to the pros and cons of various situation, so that they can arrive at their own independent conclusions based on reasoned judgment. Integrated approach to the teaching of social studies enables children to have understanding about the whole picture or message which the content is conveying. There is the need therefore for the use of integrated approach to the teaching and learning of Social Studies.

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