

An Appraisal of The National Primary Social Studies Curriculum and Its Provision for Suitable Social Experiences in Nigeria

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Abstract

“Primary Education is the foundation of educational structure and the key to success or failure of the whole system. The National Policy on Education acknowledge solid and dependable foundation” (Primary School Curriculum Modules, 1998). The National Primary Social Studies Educational Register, guided by the National Educational Research Curriculum, focuses on teaching Primary 1-6 Pupils about man, their environment, and civic responsibility. It emphasizes value-based education, including family structure, national identity, cultural diversity and Problem-solving to foster citizenship in Nigeria. The paper focuses on the National Primary School Social Studies Curriculum vis-à-vis its provision for appropriate social experiences, the objectives of the curriculum, basic approaches to the teaching of Social Studies in Primary Schools, and goes on to appraise the success or otherwise of the curriculum on the provision of social experiences.

Keywords Appraisal, Primary Schools, Social Studies, Curriculum, Social Experience

Introduction

Over the years, the inclusion of Social Studies in the process of knowledge dissemination and acquisition in the school curriculum has been justified. This is evident in its integrative approach to learning. The basis for this is manifested in the development and organization of Social Studies curriculum that is reflective of the society as well as a synonym of the national objectives of education.

The issues and trends in the society have been a major concern for Social Studies. All these, with regards to its dynamism are requisites of the Social Studies curriculum. An attempt is therefore made in this write-up to cross-examine the composition and provision of Primary School Social Studies Curriculum at meeting these objectives.

What is Social Studies?

Different Social Studies educators have attempted to define the discipline in different ways. Among such definitions are the following:

Adaralegbe (1980) defined Social Studies as “the study of how man influences and is in turn influenced by its physical, social, political, religious, economic, psychological, cultural, scientific and technological environments”. He went further to refer to Social Studies as “a way of life”.

Omosehin (2022), defined Social Studies as the study of man within his environments-physical, social, economic, psychological, religious, political, cultural, social, economic, psychological, religious, political, cultural, scientific and technological. According to him, it is a distinct integrated single subject that attempts to study virtually the totality of man’s existence on earth purposely to encourage learners to acquire knowledge, skills and values needed for understanding and coping with various problems confronting man in the course of survival.

According to Ogunsanya (2021), the goals of Social Studies education are to help students become more flexible and adaptable, to foster a sense of national pride and unity, to prepare them to be

productive members of society, and to instil in them the right values and beliefs. Educating pupils to think critically and logically, teaching them the worth of hard work and honesty, making sure they know and can follow the law, and teaching them about the environment and its problems. Indeed, learning about the world through Social Studies would help students understand the scientific world and the interdependence of nations.

Key components of the Primary Social Studies Curriculum

- i. Themes and Focus: The Curriculum is organized under core themes such as “family as the Basic Unit of Society; “My Environment,” “National Identity”, and “Social Issues”.
- ii. Curriculum Structure: It integrate Social Sciences-Sociology, anthropology, economics, and geography- to provide holistic learning about man’s interaction with the environment.
- iii. Objectives: To foster national integration, Promote Cultural awareness, reduce conflicts and build functional, responsible citizens.
- iv. Activities and Resources: The register emphasizes Practical activities, including field trips, Project-based learning, and the use of textbooks/workbooks tailored for primary learners.
- v. Scope: It is integrated into the “Social and Citizenship Studies” subject area in the new Basic Education Curriculum (nerdc.gov.ng+6).

The Concepts of Curriculum

Curriculum has been variously defined. An examination of some of these definitions will definitely give an insight to the focus of this write-up. To Akinleye (2020), curriculum is a plan for providing sets of learning opportunities to achieve broad educational goals and related specific objectives for an

identifiable population served by a single school center.

Dada (2019) also defined curriculum as the planned learning experiences provided by the school to assist the pupils in attaining designated learning outcomes to the best of their ability.

Succinctly put, curriculum could be defined as a planned programme of study, activities and guidelines provided in a school system to facilitate teaching and learning process which is to be enforced using the cognition and initiatives of the teachers.

The Social Studies Curriculum

Social Studies as one of the teaching subjects in the Nigerian system of education was introduced into the 6-3-3-4 system of education as recommended by the National Policy on Education (1981). Among other things, the National Policy on Education designated Social Studies as one of the core subjects both at the Primary as well as the first three years of the Junior Secondary School Level. The establishment of the new system of education in 1982 led to the preparation of new programme of studies by experts and educators drawn from various constituted educational institutions all over the country.

The National Education Research Council (NERC) and the Comparative Education Studies and Adaptation Centre (CESAC) were mandated by the joint Consultative Committee (JCC) through its various reference committees for Primary, Secondary and Teachers Education, the Institute of Education in the Nigerian Universities to develop curricula for Social Studies in the Primary, Secondary Schools and the Teacher Training Colleges.

In 1982, the Reference Committee harmonized the Social Studies curricula prepared by the NERC and CESAC for recommendation and national approval for implementation and use for both Primary and Junior Secondary Schools.

Basic Approaches to the Teaching of Social Studies in Primary Schools

The structure of Social Studies curriculum is organized along some approaches. These are the use of concepts and generalizations, thematic approach, problem solving approach and learners' centeredness or pupils' activity method. This shall be discussed as follows:

1. Concepts and Generalization

Concepts are simply ideas, which are either imaginary or real. They are generalized ideas,

class of things, objects and events according to their shared characteristics.

In Social Studies curriculum according to Afuye (2021), there are real concepts which can be related to the experience of the learners as well as imaginary concepts. These are otherwise called concrete and abstract concepts. Examples of concrete or real concepts as used in the Primary Social Studies curriculum are table and chair, political groups etc. while that of abstract or imaginary concept are marriage, cooperation, culture, leadership, followership etc.

Generalization on the other hand shows relationship between and among concepts. Generalizations are generally valid statements or expressions about people, places or things that are yet to be tested or proved. Generalizations are encouraged in Social Studies curriculum in order to develop in pupils a positive attitude to other people, events or situations or possibility to teach other virtues.

The argument in favour of the inclusion of concepts and generalizations into Social Studies curriculum is that Social Studies as a discipline focuses its attention mainly on man, the sole dominating occupant of the environments, his relationships and interaction with the environment. The argument further stressed that these relationships revolve around conceptual issues that make the environment manageable.

2. The use of Thematic Approach

As indicated by the Primary School Social Studies Curriculum, the thematic approach involves the development of themes or topic around which the whole curriculum is built. Themes in Social Studies are those central ideas about the functionality of the society. These are identified from the analysis of the problems and issues that are imminent in the society.

They could be large topics or large problem areas, from each theme, a number of sub-themes are generated while from each sub-theme, some topics are also developed, each of these topics or units are then broken down into a number of teachable lessons depending on the duration of each lessons as stipulated by the respectable timetable.

The importance of units approach is that it enables the learners to see the interrelatedness among the units of instructions.

Among other importance of unit approach are: enhancing better understanding, making teaching more practical, allowing for a sound sense of judgment in learners, giving room for the acquisition of problem solving skills and being a learning and not a teaching process, thereby allowing the learners to solve their problems themselves. It also encourages for use of concept mapping in Social Studies, where societal issues and problems are being identified and solutions proffered (Adegboye, 2023).

3. The Problem Solving Approach

Social Studies curriculum is organized on the basis of the major problem of the society which are identified for study. The causes and effects of these problems and issues are examined and solutions are sought.

4. Pupils Activity Method

The Provision of the Primary Social Curriculum in Nigeria allows the pupils the freedom to select and organize the learning experiences as well as learn freely, individually and in groups. This is

intended to be achieved through a series of intended activities which the pupils engage in.

Aims and Objectives of Primary Social Studies Programme

As earlier indicated, Social Studies as a school subject is an attempt at achieving the

National aims and goals of education in Nigeria generally. Hence, the Primary School Social Studies is not an exception.

Ajala (2022) quoting New National Social Studies Curriculum (NNSSC) lists the following as the objectives of Social Studies in Primary Schools in Nigeria:

- i. Developments of ability to adapt to the changing environment;
- ii. To inculcate national consciousness and unity;
- iii. To help Nigerian child become a good citizen who is capable and willing to contribute to national development; and
- iv. To inculcate the right attitudes, values and skills in learners.

Furthermore, Nigeria Primary Social Studies have been designed to achieve some other general objectives including the following:

- i. To develop children's self-confidence and initiative that is based on an understanding of their individual accomplishments, potentialities and worth;
- ii. To develop learners power of imagination and continued learning;
- iii. To develop learners desire for knowledge and continued learning;
- iv. To develop learners appreciation of the dignity of man and labour;
- v. To develop a spirit of national consciousness and patriotism in learners through interest and involvement in the local national and world heritage.

- vi. The creation of the learners' social awareness, critical judgment as well as constructive and effective thinking.

The Review of National Primary Social Studies Curriculum

The Nigerian Primary Social Studies Curriculum has evolved three significant phases till date. The three phases are:

1. The 1971 National Social Studies curriculum for Primary Schools in Nigeria;
2. The 1983 National Social Studies curriculum for Primary Schools; and
3. The 1988 National Social Studies curriculum for Primary Schools.

The 1971 National Social Studies Curriculum which was borne out of the National Workshop on Primary School Curriculum held between April 26 and May 1971 spread headed by the then Nigeria Education Research Council (NERC) now known as Nigerian Educational Research and Development (NERDC) formed the debut of National Social Studies Curriculum for Primary Schools in Nigeria.

In terms of provision, the programme specified among others the nature of Social Studies in Nigeria as those common learning of man's interaction with his social and physical environment, a way of life of how man influences and is in turn influenced by all facets of his environment.

Thus, it was clarified that Social Studies is not a combination nor amalgamation of the traditional school subjects but rather the totality of experiences and understanding imbued in course of studies that is based on man's problem of his environment.

Pertinent in the provision was that of conception of social studies as a problem owing discipline by indicating certain content for instance the problem of adjustment home

and in school that extended family, interpersonal and peer relationship, inflicting ethical and moral values etc.

Finally, based on the above provision, course outlines were produced for all levels of primary Schools.

The 1983 National Social Studies Curriculum for Primary Schools came to using as a result curriculum for Primary Schools in Nigeria. The review was done via the Primary Education Social Studies Curriculum Project put in place by the Nigeria Educational Research Council (NERC).

Prominent among the shortcomings of the 1971 National Social Studies Curriculum for Primary Schools as identified by Ajala (2022) while quoting Ogundare (2020), includes deviation in the statement of objectives and contents of the subject to comply with the problems approach. Social Studies then was being taught from the standpoints traditional discipline such as history, economics, geography, etc. which does not help learners to appreciate the substance of Social Studies. The committee, through problems-approach development was able to curtail the noted shortcomings of the 1971 National Social Studies Curriculum for Primary Schools.

As per the 1988 National Social Studies Curriculum for Primary Schools, the aid curriculum was developed by the National Implementation Committee on National Policy on Education at the instance of the National Primary Education Commission (NPEC) in 1988 titled “Primary School Curriculum Modules” which was tailored alongside spiral curriculum where in pupils are taken from known to unknown, from their immediate environment to distant one, hence, the same topics were developed from Primary One through Primary Six however with certain degree of complexity up the ladder which thus

make higher levels comprehensive. In terms of content, topics from the 1971 and 1983 curriculum constitute the contents.

It needs be reiterated here that 1983 National Social Studies Curriculum for Primary school is still currently used across the federation.

Factors Militating Against the Achievement of the Set Objectives

Despite the various set aims, objectives and methods of teaching Social Studies for appropriate learners’ social experiences, there are some constraints which militate against the achievement of the set objectives.

- i. Inadequate Funding: Lack of school funding prevents the acquisition of essential learning aids and materials. Many of the methods and materials that can be used to teach learners are very expensive and cannot come by within the environment of the learners (e.g. field trips and excursions). Primary School Pupils cannot provide enough fund for such learning technique.
- ii. There is need for further review of the curriculum since the society is not static but dynamic. The last review was in 1988 (26 years ago). Social Studies curriculum is a product of the society and therefore must be dynamic. There are some current public issues which have not been included in the Primary School Social Studies Curriculum. For example, there are contemporary public issues as the HIV/AIDS scourge, gender education, women trafficking, women empowerment, child labour etc.
- iii. The method of evaluation used in Primary Schools laid much emphasis on cognitive aspect of learning in form of continuous assessment, test and end of terms examinations. Other aspects like the effective and psychomotor aspects of knowledge are not adequately evaluated. These areas are very vital or measuring the appropriateness of Social Studies instruction at any level of education.

- iv. **Unqualified Teachers:** Many teachers lack specialized knowledge of Social Studies methods, which undermines the ability to teach the subject effectively. Many of the Social Studies teachers are experts in various traditional school disciplines, which have little or no knowledge about the contents and methodology of the subject.
- v. **Limited Focus on critical Thinking:** A focus on rote memorization for examinations rather than fostering critical thinking, analysis, and civic engagement prevents students from achieving the broader goals of Social Studies.
- vi. **Societal and Academic and Academic Pressure:** The prioritization of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects creates a perception that Social Studies is less crucial, reducing students' commitment.
- vii. **Poor Curriculum Implementation:** The curriculum is often not properly implemented due to poor training and limited pedagogical innovation, often relying solely on textbooks.

The new Structure and Organizations of Primary Social Studies Curriculum in Nigeria.

As a result of modification of 1971 and Primary school Curriculum the National Social Studies Curriculum for Primary School followed the modular structure which enables all teachers to teach the same topics in details. While aiming at achieving the uniformity in educational practices across the nation, the Primary School Curriculum Modules in its introductory aspect explained that modules break the contents of the syllabus down into the topics. They define the objective to classroom learning experiences for pupils and as such, makes the achievement of Primary Education possible.

Among others, the use of module enables the use of inquiry, research, practical work experiment which in turn involve pupils in the quest for knowledge: it also assists in facilitating educational measurement for prescribing the

mastery responses in the performance objectives. In addition, the use of module also encourages pupils to search for knowledge hence, cultivating the habit of making use of library on the part of pupils.

Through the use of spiral curriculum the structure and organization of social studies curriculum employed the use of themes with each class having module number, content, elements, behavioural objectives, teaching, learning aids as well as teaching hints and suggestion of assessment techniques coupled with the number of weeks the module covers.

The structure no doubt indicates the use of themes generally, learners are also given ample opportunities of participating in the teaching-learning process, hence learner-centred.

It is however noted that quite a number of teachers are still confused about how to teach and evaluate the subject as stipulated in the curriculum.

Conclusion

The place of Social Studies especially in the University Basic Education in the Present dispensation can never be overemphasized. Social Studies has subsumed the traditional subjects at both Primary and Secondary Schools. A failure on the part of the subject to adequately address problems confronting man may spell doom for the entire nation. Hence, no stone must be left unturned in securing effectiveness of the subject.

As such, the much needed experiences that is capable of putting the learners on their toes must be put in place. This cannot be achieved via a redundant and obsolete curriculum, the more reason why a new curriculum must be fashioned out to take care of the exigencies of global era.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to improve the quality delivery of Social Studies curriculum at the primary school level in Nigeria.

1. All the stakeholders with the implementation of Social Studies curriculum content should be actively involved and committed to ensure the effective implementation of Social Studies curriculum in Nigeria.
2. Social Studies teachers need to be aligned with the appropriate and innovative teaching methods and strategies and as well employ them while teaching Social Studies.
3. Resource Provision. Government should fund the schools to enhance adequate supply of necessary instructional facilities.
4. Uniform Curriculum: Government should ensure uniform content distribution to avoid disparities between urban and rural schools.
5. Enhanced Training: Teachers should be trained regularly in modern instructional techniques and proper use of evaluation methods.

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