

## SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION: A VERITABLE TOOL FOR NATIONAL UNITY IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*This paper tries to examine some of the unresolved socio-economic and political factors that are calling Nigeria national unity to questioning. National unity is generally seen as the bedrock to the development of any nation. Perhaps, this explains the reason why threat to the unity of any group of people is always viewed with all seriousness. The unity of Nigeria is therefore, paramount to her overall developments, hence various steps are always taken to overcome any incidence that will threaten the oneness of Nigeria. One of such step taken was the introduction of social studies in the school curriculum with specific content that could heal the wounds of Nigerians and achieve unity in diversity. The paper therefore examines the nature and concept of social studies, the growth and development of social studies and the concept of national unity. It further dwelt on the role of social studies in achieving national unity in Nigeria which is identified under themes as good citizenship, creation of awareness fostering of national unity and how social studies and national unity are related. The paper concluded that both of them are closely related as they seek to strengthen the overall development of a nation. Recommendations were made in order to make the teaching and learning of social studies vibrant for the attainment of national unity in Nigeria among such recommendations were the use of pragmatic approach in the teaching and learning of social studies, training and re-training of teachers teaching the subject, constant review of the subject curriculum to meet the present needs of the society similar noting that the subject should be taught at all levels of Nigeria educational system in order to make the learners appreciate the value of national unity.*

**Key words:** Social studies education, veritable tools, national unity

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### Introduction

Social Studies as an integrated discipline in the educational system of Nigeria is a study which emphasizes the process of identifying and solving problems for the survival of man which also includes the ability to maintain peace, an orderly, decent and progressive life (Adeyemi, 2019). Thus, the importance of Social Studies as an instrument for national unity cannot be over emphasized. Social Studies as a discipline, study people in their environment in order to understand their problems and to find solutions to issues relating to integration, socio-economic development as well as values in the individual (Ajitoni, 2013), it is a societal

based discipline that is directed towards solving problems of the society that is why it is tailored to meet the needs of the Nigerian society. The inquiry spirit in the learner for technological, economic, social, physical and cultural transformation of the society (Kam, 2008). makes the discipline all encompassing.

The Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) has made unity as a principal factor for development as documented in her national objectives which have been enclosed as necessary foundation for National Policy on Education (FRCN, 2004). This is a clear manifestation that progress and development of any society radiates around national unity: hence every society strives to achieve greater

unity for its progress. Social Studies was brought as a subject to bear for the purpose of achieving unity in diversity. It is a problem solving discipline that is usually introduced to solve prevailing societal problems (Gbadamosi, 2013).

### **The Concept of Social Studies**

Social Studies touch on every facet of human existence and it has long been identified as a veritable tool/avenue for reshaping society. Social studies occupy an important position in the school curriculum because the subject has been recognized as an effective tool for citizenship education in Nigeria. It is also a subject that equips the learners with critical thinking and problem solving skills which enable them to tackle problems and issues that may arise in their socio-economic life (Ibrahim, 2015). Social studies focus attention on students' challenges (social, economic, political and environment). Naturally, students will want to observe, ask questions, seek information and express and draw idea, argue for their view points and act to change things. When students offer Social Studies, they draw on thinking skills and knowledge from the entire school curriculum as they construct an understanding of their social world and seek to solve the problems it presents. As a result of this, the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) in Nigeria categorized Social Studies as one of the core subjects in Nigeria school's curriculum as encapsulated in the National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004).

Since its inception in the school curriculum, the term "Social Studies" has been given different interpretations by educators and scholars worldwide. This is because of its historical origin or background in the different countries. The nature of Social Studies places man in the center of universe, hence it is being seen as the study of man as he interacts with the various environments be it social, physical, economic, culture, intellectual, scientific, physical, economic, cultural, intellectual, scientific and technological. The focus of it study include how man solves his problem (Fadeiye, 2005). This now brings us to the issue whether social studies have the capability of bringing unity in Nigeria. The content of Social Studies

is designed to accommodate human differences that breed disunity.

Social Studies derives its content from the aspects of social science disciplines that are meant for the reformation of human character for peace, unity and development (Jekanyinfa, 2004). It is worth mentioning here that the problems that bring disaffection among human beings cannot be said to be only political, social, economic, religious or psychological. It is against this backdrop that Social Studies uses the content of social science subject to present learning experiences to learners in a holistic manner instead of compartmentalization as presented by those disciplines. (Ezegbe, 2014) agrees with this assertion that Social Studies does not restrict its content as it unchanging bodies of knowledge and skills have cut across all the social science subjects in order to achieve its defined objective and goals. However, Social Studies is not geography. It is neither history nor government. It is not economics. Social Studies is not an amalgamation of social sciences. Rather, it is an area of the curriculum designed specifically for the study of man and how man's problems are solved. It deals with how man can fit into the society by utilizing the necessary attitudes, values and skills. Social Studies focuses on the use of critical and reflective thinking to solve the problems of man's survival in his social and political environment, to which peace and unity are veritable tools (Ashiwaju, 2002).

### **The Concept of National Unity and Patriotism**

National unity can be seen as the coming together of people from different ethnic groups and background, irrespective of tribe or religion, class and position to unite together for the purpose of promoting peace and harmony having a common national goals and a sense of national consciousness. This simply refers to the process by which people or individual come together to promote people means of satisfaction and mutual understanding among the nation or country.

National unity also referred to those various programmes and strategies adopted by a nation or group of individual in order to promote unity in diversity, for instance, in

Nigeria, the government have tried different ways in promoting national unity through national and interstate sport, inter-ethnic marriage, National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) (Festival of Art and Culture, 1977 & Ogwu, 2006).

National unity is very necessary in Nigeria because of the following reasons;

6. Firstly, the need for peace and unity among cultural groups.
7. Second, the need to ensure mutual respect among tribes and tongue due to the heterogeneous (diverse) nature of country in terms of the member of ethnic groups and religious groups in the country.
8. Third, the need to bring interdependence of individual societal groups to focus on National development unity since no society is self-sufficient. Since all of us cannot be doing the same thing at the same time or do all things at the same time or do all things equally well.

### **Factors Militating Against National Unity in Nigeria**

Despite the various attempts in Nigeria to ensure genuine national unity, ethnic suspicion still looms large within the polity. Basically, the inability to attain full national unity can be accounted for by the contradictions that used to emanate from some of the policies enacted to ensure national unity in the process of execution, and the non-committal of government to observe the details and after effects of such policies. For examples, in spite of the principles of "quota system" and "federal character", political office holders often use the appointment into public office responsibilities and the accompanying benefits for their particular ethnic or tribal groups.

Notionally, those who are excluded would be thinking of being marginalized and there emerge the struggle to have the mantle of power shifted. The two religions (Islam and Christianity) in Nigeria are dividing us rather than uniting us. Examples are the Maitasine religious uprising in Kano and Yola (2013) Sharia riots in Kaduna (2015) among others.

One other factor that has posed as an obstacle to national unity is the distribution

of national "wealth". It is important to note that there has been an acceptable method for distribution of national wealth in Nigeria because government is committed to ensuring balance, both in economic and social development across the country the resources of the nation are been distributed in the pursuit of the goal. However, its produces its own contradictions in process of implementation as the areas that produce the resource are left underdeveloped. For instance, the recent probe of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) officials is a reaction to this anomaly.

The issue of bad leadership isa question which manifested through tribalism, nepotism, corruption "divide and rule" which our leaders use to ensure that they keep themselves perpetually in office. They do this, by promoting ethnicity and sectional loyalties instead of nationalism and the values of good citizenship.

To solve all these problems, there should be a formulation of national policy that can be consistent with the concept of the nation state (Ogunleye, 2000). The unity of Nigeria is therefore an issue that cannot be toiled with. This is because the success or otherwise of this country depends on harmonies living among the populace, this explains the reason why cordial relationship should be encouraged among Nigerians.

### **Social Studies Education and National Unity**

On the issue of Social Studies' role and responsibility towards national unity ((Okam, 2002) maintains that Social Studies should play key roles in the integration and development process of the society. Integration is an enterprise that works to pulling resources together and its primary concern is for socio-economic development of the welfare of the people. (Ashiwaju, 2012), in this context assert that the Social Studies curriculum has to be designed to help integrate and generate products capable of helping to change the lives of Nigerians. This is because it is what the teacher is taught that he/she teaches. (Ogunsanya, 1984) also argues that integration is a process by which attempt are made to stimulate socio-economic relations available in the various regions of a country. Also, to help forge a

bigger socio-economic environment this will enhance social and economic growth and development. These aspects are very vital because Social Studies curriculum has to teach integration, mutuality and truth fully, since Nigeria is a diverse country. When such teaching is done within the context of Social Studies, it has a great benefit to the wider society.

The curriculum, focusing on unity, demonstrates the need for the overall-wealth of the society being shared and everybody benefitting from it (Alaq, 2012) associates unity with the type of relationship that exist between units that are independent of each other, such as, ethnic groups and kinship groups. They can all come together under one umbrella in a large group, whose aim is to work together. Unity can take any form, which can be political, economic, social or cultural.

In Nigeria today, we have up to over four hundred and fifty ethnic groups having varied language and cultures (Adeyemi, 2019). All these are working toward integration. People are seen now interchanging their way of dressing.

Social studies touch on every facets of human existence and it has long been identified as a veritable tool or avenue for reshaping society. The very nature, content and scope of new socio-political order According to (Akinlaye, 2003), one of the goals and objectives of social studies is to create an awareness and an understanding of our social and physical environment as a whole in its natural, man-made cultural and spiritual resources for national development.

Second, no society can be self-sufficient by itself. There is bound to be inter-dependence in term of food supplies, raw materials and many other things. There is also the issue of specialization, where group of people are more specialized in one phenomenon than others. So there is bound to be groups complementing one another.

Third, in view of the fact that as a nation, we need unity and peace, we must develop national identity and unity which can make people traveling from one place to another and this makes them able to see differences in other places and people. People learn each other's languages, as earlier mentioned. This is encouraged by the

National Policy on Education as it is reflected in the national curriculum (NPE, 2004).

Social studies education in Nigeria has a special task to perform in transforming Nigeria into a modern state. They include: healing the social, political and religious wounds of the past decades, nurturing the most recent hopes in good ethnic group relationship and nationalism, and the engendering of constructive reforms to make the nation a just and progressive society.

Lastly, the National Youth Service has also encouraged mutual respects, convergence and unity among different tribes in the country, since university graduate are posted to areas other than their home states, thereby providing them the opportunity to learn cultures, languages or even intermarry. The mass media also helps to foster unity among the citizens of a nation, as they learn about people's cultures, dances and peculiarities. The Nigeria laws allow citizens to live whenever they like thus facilitating national unity and integration. Sport is not left out in this work of integration. This is because in sports, various people are brought together, and as people celebrate victory they get united.

It is therefore important to note that in order to achieve stability in Nigeria society, Social Studies education has a lot to do both in content and context. The curriculum needed to be structured towards imparting in the learners the society's values that unite the populace. Learners should be taught the importance of unity to the development of the country. And teachers could also initiated dialogue on issues of national unity after the learners are being exposed to the concept of the discipline.

Social Studies education contributes in the attainment of national goals through citizenship education. Citizenship education refers to the culture of certain behaviour, knowledge output and values which are found in the culture the individual participate.

It also helps to foster the desire for self-reliance, cooperation, national efficiency and national pride. It furthers plays the role of making the people appreciate and respect the cultural diversity of Nigeria and to realize the need for cooperation, tolerance, unity, and people in the country (Adeyemi, 2019)

the nations policy on education is government way of realizing that part of national goals which can be achieved using education as a veritable tools. The national policy on education is formulated and anchored on the overall philosophy of Nigeria as a nation which include to; live in peace and harmony as one indivisible, indissoluble, democratic and sovereign nation founded on the principles of freedom, equity and justice; promoting inter-African solidarity and world peace through understanding.

### Conclusion

Consequent upon the issues addressed above, the following conclusions were drawn.

1. The inculcation of national consciousness and national unity, social values and skills for active social life through social studies education, serve as necessary ingredients for nation building.
2. Social Studies education plays a very vital role in the development of the critical and national thinking ability of the citizens for practical social lives, promotion of political literacy and encouraging democratic values and principles in tackling dynamic problem in the society
3. Social Studies enable citizens to develop positive attitudes towards other people and towards citizenship, and also to contribute their best towards the welfare of the society and nation building.
4. Government should also encouraged and support the establishment of more neighborhood schools by communities, voluntary organizations and faith-based organization to synergize existing culture.

Lastly considering the look-worm attitudes of parents especially in the rural areas in sending their children to schools, the government should enact a law that stipulates punishment for defaulting parent who will fails to send their wards to schools.

- i. The knowledge of concept of unity which is derived from Social Studies education once removed from Social Studies curriculum, the discipline will become value. This explains the reason

why most experts in the field usually see the concept of unity in diversity as one of the major pillars that holds not only Social Studies curriculum but the national development and integration.

- ii. The knowledge of the concept of religious tolerance which is derived from Social Studies education has help to place students on a common line of thought making them to see the worth of each other religion and thereby living in peace and harmony with one another.
- iii. The knowledge of the concept of intertribal marriage which is derived from Social Studies education do not succeed in unifying the thinking of students, so that they could have a common opinion concerning the issue of intertribal marriage among the various tribal groups in Nigeria.

### Recommendation

The paper therefore recommends the following for effective use of social studies education for achievement of national unity in Nigeria.

First, concept of culture, religion and religious tolerance, marriage and intertribal marriages, which are the core of Social Studies education, should be well taught at various level of teaching. Knowledge of Social Studies education in all its known aspect will certainly provide a basis for molding our school children into reasonable adults that will live in Nigeria as one big family.

Second, qualified, competent and committed teachers of Social Studies should be saddled with the task of teaching the subject in our various school system. This is in view of the fact that, the classroom teacher is the primary determinant of what the students learn, therefore, the success of our educational system depends on teachers' quality, devotion and effectiveness.

Third, government at the various levels should on its own part provide a conducive teaching and learning environment for teachers and students. This entails making the condition of work bearable for teacher, provision of adequate relevant teaching/learning facilities, as well as providing accessible education to all students.

Four, parents on their own part should try to inculcate the spirit of love for all, into their children, so that their children will have positive thoughts of other people who differ from them religiously, culturally, socially and linguistically. This is to be ensured if parents (as families) learnt to continue to live peacefully with other neighboring families who may be from different cultural and religious affiliations. Marriages between families who are from different cultures should be encouraged, so that a Nigeria of one generation could be built in future.

Finally, pragmatic approach such as team teaching, inquiring method, and project method should be employed in the teaching of Social Studies to instill the right attitudes of unity among the students while constant review of Social Studies curriculum to meet present challenges that are capable of threatening Nigeria national unity should be given utmost priority.

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