

Social Studies in Other Nations: A Focus on Nigerian Social Studies/Global Education

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Abstract: This paper discusses the role of the role of social studies education in Nigeria. Amidst problems of mass education, funding, inequities, intolerance, corruption, weak governance, access to quality education, curriculum development, effective instructional methods, research, and teacher education, Nigeria embarks upon a democratic path to national unity and peace.

Introduction

Nigeria is located in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is a nation in perpetual crises. After the civil war, a booming petroleum exports and revenue, and a relatively peaceful period from 1970 to 1979, Nigeria today is attempting to correct past wrongs as it deals with recurring economic, political, religious and ethnic conflicts. Concerned about the future of a nation full with natural, material and human resources, some educators are designing educational programs and activities aimed at addressing the root causes of the political, ethnic/tribal and economic conflicts.

Citizenship education is at the core of the social studies education curriculum in Nigeria. As the nation struggles to create viable programs amidst problems of mass education, funding, inequities in access to education, curriculum development, instructional methods, research, and teacher education, citizenship education programs and activities have become crucial to sustaining the goals, objectives, and aspirations of the nation (Farouk, 1998). The Nigerian Constitution remains the supreme law of the nation, providing the guidelines and frameworks for the structure of government and for governance.

Background

Nigeria embodies 235 ethnic groups speaking approximately 400 languages and practicing traditional African religions, Christianity, and Islam. Since independence from Britain in 1960, Nigeria has moved between democracy and military rule. Three major ethnic groups, representing different political traditions, continue to influence social and political events strongly. The Hausa-Fulani, in the north, are mostly Muslim and traditionally support a centralized authoritarian system with a strong village chief and local Emir. The Igbos, in the southeast, are mostly Christians who traditionally live in autonomous village communities and are noted for indirect democracy. The Yoruba, in the west, follow a mixture of religions and lie midway between the direct democracy of the Igbos and the authoritarian systems of the Hausa-Fulani in their traditional government. The Yoruba have traditional leaders and a council of hereditary chiefs who make decisions in addition to those made by local self-governing units (Orimoloye, 1983). Although the Yorubas and Igbos differ greatly in culture and traditional political system, they are often viewed as southerners in contrast to Hausa-Fulani northerners. Politically, the Igbos and Yorubas are lumped together because of the generally higher levels of education as a result of early exposure to Western ideas brought in by the missionaries.

The new social studies curriculum should reflect goals stated in the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981). In 1999, Nigeria became a constitutional democratic nation. The new Constitution addresses core national issues such as citizenship,

fundamental human rights, the legislature, the executive branch, the judiciary, national identity, political parties, etc. The assumption here is that the new Constitution can be a catalyst and stimulus that engenders national consciousness, political participation, and personal development. Citizenship education will provide the content, programs, and activities for students. National consciousness has been hindered by the Nigerian political discontinuity and instability because of the irregular political regimes. For example, between 1960 and 1999, there have been eight military and four civilian regimes in the country. Now that the nation has embarked on sustaining democracy and national unity, the social studies curriculum needs to be reexamined to reflect national goals and aspirations, principles, skills, and values needed to sustain a constitutional democratic nation, as there is a sustained record of corruption and human rights abuses in Nigeria. The corruption and the lack of human respect and human dignity combined with weak governance are attributable to the years of authoritarian military and so-called democratic civilian regimes. As the nation approaches state and national elections, political scientists and social educators are concerned about the role citizenship education will play in preparing the youth for active participation in Nigerian politics as well as its future.

History and Philosophy

At independence in 1960, Nigerian educators, joining educators from other African nations, were concerned about the inherited British educational systems and sought ways to change them to make it suitable to the needs and aspirations of the new and emerging nations (Merryfield & Muyanda-Mutebi, 1991). In September 1967, eleven African nations—Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Nigeria, Sierra-Leone, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia, met at Queen's Oxford in England to discuss needs and priorities in curriculum development in Africa. A year later, representatives from the above nations agreed to meet in Mombassa, Kenya to address three basic questions: (a) What is social studies? (b) What should be the objectives in social studies education? and (c) What approach should be used in teaching social studies? These questions became the framework within which Nigerian social studies education was organized. Moreover, the representatives discussed and debated the integration of the traditional subjects such as history, geography, and civics as well as disciplines such as economics, sociology, and anthropology into the social studies curriculum to reflect the goals and aspirations of the nations.

In 1969, a national curriculum conference was staged to overhaul the Nigerian education system. The outcome was the recognition of the importance of social studies as a means of inculcating national consciousness, effective citizenship, national unity, and national reconstruction, influenced by the civil war in which over 1 million Nigerians died (Adaralagbe, 1992; Farouk, 1997). Farouk (1997) argued that the first national curriculum forum aimed to depart from the rigid, authoritarian, and colonial curriculum framework that had dominated the practices and teaching of social studies in Nigeria. But there is evidence that the teaching methods and the curriculum still have vestiges of the colonial influence (K. Banya, personal communication, April 15, 2001).

Goals and Purposes

Ogundare (1991) examined the goals and objectives of social studies education to determine whether they are consistent with the goals and objectives of the Mass Mobilization for Self-Reliance, Social Justice, and Economic Recovery (MAMSER), and found that they are in agreement. He concluded that the programs and activities were consistent with goals and objectives, and therefore inculcated the values and habits that can give rise to a self-reliant civic

society (Farouk, 1998). One of the goals of education in Nigeria as outlined in the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981) identifies citizenship education as “a basis for effective participation in, and contribution to the life of the society; character and moral training, and the development of sound attitudes; developing in the child the ability to adapt to his changing environment” (p. 7).

According to the Federal government, there are five national educational objectives, all aiming to build (a) a free and democratic society, (b) a just and egalitarian society, (c) a united, strong and self-reliant nation, (d) a great and dynamic economy, and (e) a land of bright and full opportunity for all citizens (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981). In the social studies curriculum in America, five traditions guide the discussion of “What Knowledge is of Most Worth”: (a) citizenship transmission, (b) social sciences or the structuring of social disciplines, (c) reflective inquiry, (d) social criticism, and (e) personal development (Barr, Barth & Shermis, 1977; Martorella, 1996). The state social order is founded on ideals of freedom, equality and justice. In furtherance of the social order, the Nigerian Constitution (1999) afforded citizens the following rights: (a) equality of rights, obligations and opportunities before the law; (b) recognition, maintenance and enhancement of the sanctity of the human person and human dignity; (c) humane governmental actions; (d) prevention of exploitation of human or natural resources in any form whatsoever for reasons other than for the good of the community; and (e) the security and maintenance of independent, impartial, and honest courts of law, and their easy accessibility.

According to Merryfield & Muyanda-Mutebi (1991), African nations need to address: (a) students’ understanding of interactions between different cultural, social and physical environments, (b) students’ appreciation of their homes and heritages, (c) development of academic and social skills and attitudes expected of citizens and (d) freedom of expression of ideas in a variety of ways. Adaralage (1972), in a paper delivered at the National Conference in Ibadan, Nigeria, concluded that the importance of social studies was that it was recognized as a means for instilling national consciousness, effective citizenship, national unity, and national reconstruction (Farouk & Ukpokodu, 1995). In Nigeria, social studies education was immensely influenced by the five national objectives stated in the Second National Development Plan (NDP, 1970-1974). The objectives became the foundation for the National Policy on Education. But in the first National Development Plan (1966-1970), the Federal government emphasized modernization and technological training. In curriculum terms, this meant that more attention and financial resources would be allocated to academic disciplines such as mathematics, chemistry, and physics and less to subjects such as history, music, art, English, religious studies, nature study, and physical education.

As Nigeria moves forward to undo past wrongs, embrace democracy and a market economy, it is important to prepare Nigerian youth to think nationally and globally. According to Farouk (1995), if Nigeria is to develop and evolve, there must be a new and positive ethnic, inter-cultural, socio-political orientation to guarantee national stability, peace, and economic growth. According to Meziebi (1992), the objectives of social studies education in Nigeria are the following: (a) man’s awareness of his environments and beyond and his survival in them; (b) man utilizing his reasoning, imagination, critically and constructively to identify and solve his personal skills, attitudes, societal problems and contribute to national development; and (c) man acquiring skills, attitudes, and values essential for his harmonious and effective co-existence, interdependence and functionality. Since independence, Nigerians have worked to develop a form of government that could effectively serve people with such disparate traditional political systems (Sunal, Gaba, & Osa, 1987). Unity has a major national goal. Fostering national unity

through citizenship education is emphasized in objectives for social studies. Social studies curriculum then was tied to the National Educational Policy in 1981 and to the national aspiration with Citizenship Education at the core. In 1996, a new curriculum on Citizenship Education was developed to reflect the transition to constitutional democracy and the new Constitution (M. Farouk, personal communication, August 1, 2001).

The Federal Ministry of Education views national unity, consciousness and identity as major national goals (Farouk, 2001). The philosophy of the social studies education hinges in part on the idea that Nigerian schools should not only train individuals to be just and competent individuals, but also to function as contributing and participatory members of a free constitutional democratic nation. This implies that students must rely on the knowledge, skills and awareness of the rights of minority and majority groups to coexist and worship freely; respect law and order; and respect public and private property of Nigerians and non-Nigerians. This includes the awareness of the rights and obligations of citizens to government and society, and reciprocal government responsibility to citizens. It is believed that the interaction of the reciprocal obligations would foster socio-political stability and facilitate national development (Farouk, 1995a).

Curriculum and Instruction

Curriculum and instruction in social studies education today is still reminiscent of the British colonial and imperial frameworks. Although in the past educators have attempted to Africanize both the curriculum and instruction, minimum gains have been recorded (Farouk, 1998). For example, rote learning and centralized examinations are still prevalent and imposed. The implications for democratic and classroom practices are obvious: it limits students' creativity, imagination, cooperation, and social skills.

Suggestions

The integration of citizenship and democracy education with global education will provide for a smooth, practical, and easy transformation of national identity and national consciousness, and perhaps national peace. Finally, Farouk (1998) suggests that there has to be cooperation between the agents of political socialization if the aims and goals of citizenship, global education and the goals and aspirations of the nation are to be realized. It will require a huge national effort, funding, and a long-term vision and commitment from stakeholders, especially from the Federal Republic of Nigeria, if the goals are to be realized. As Miller (2000) asserted, a community will be considered good when citizens are actively engaged in deciding their common future together. Abdullahi and Farouk (1999) believe that the new democratic Nigeria will require humanistic, constructivist and holistic approaches to teaching and learning about citizenship and democracy in the new age.

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