

Utilizing Concepts And Generalizations In Selecting And Organizing Social Studies Contents

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Abstract

The broad field or integrated Social Studies is a wide range of disciplines from which Social Studies derives its contents. Concepts and generalizations play a very prominent role in the selection and organization of Social Studies content most importantly it helps us to grasp with realities of our environments. Thus, this paper attempts to explore various scholastic views of concepts and generalizations in Social Studies. It also gives an illustration on the use of concepts and generalizations in selecting Social Studies contents; reviews various benefits of its usage and finally concludes that there is need for teachers, educators and curriculum developers of Social Studies to select and organize the content of the discipline based on concepts and generalizations.

Key words: Concepts, Content, Curriculum, Generalizations, Social Studies.

Introduction

It is important to note when discussing the content (collection of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to be learned) of integrated Social Studies that one could with emphasis talk about the content of economics, history, biology, geography, political science, civics etc, it may not be so easy to delineate the content of Social Studies (Ajiboye, Adu & Amosun, 2005). The reason for this is that whereas all these other school subjects' study a specific aspect of man's life, Social Studies from the integrationists perspective aims at studying the totality of people's interaction with their multi dynamic environments.

For meaningful and successful learning about peoples' total environments through Social Studies, facts, concepts, skills, generalizations etc. have therefore to be derived from these other disciplines which have accumulated detailed knowledge about specific aspects of man's life (Akinlaye, Mansaray & Ajiboye, 1996). In other words, the content of Social Studies includes aspect of knowledge from a wide range of other subjects, as diagrammatized below:

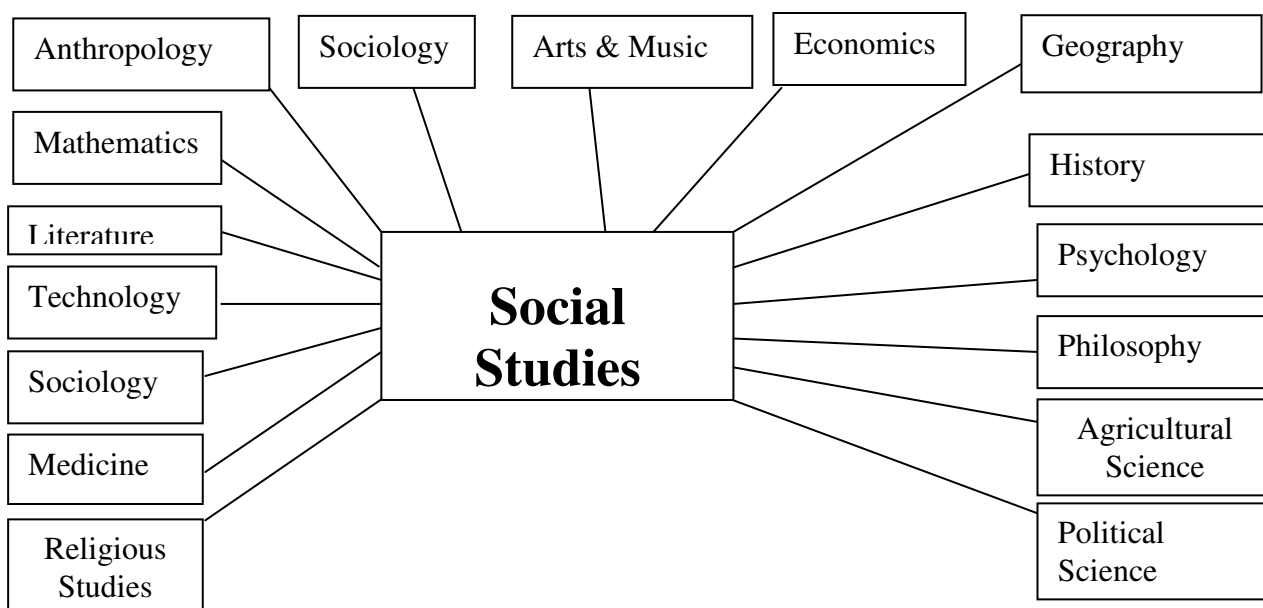


Fig 1: The Broad fields of Social Studies

Source: Modified from Akinlaye, et al. (1996)

Social Studies is structured so that the discipline is actually derived from the realities of the learners for whom the content is meant. In order to help the teacher decide on what to select as content of Social Studies, basic hints to be considered are the objectives of the lesson, validity of the content, significance of the content, learners' interest, learnability and utility of the content (Akinlaye, et al., 1996). When this is successfully done, the other crucial problem to tackle and surmount is how to organize the content so selected. Since each discipline has a way of organizing its contents from part to whole, the central focus of this paper therefore is to explore the use of concepts and generalizations in organizing the contents of Social Studies.

What are Concepts?

Ogunsanya (1984) defines concepts as simple ideals which are either imaginary or real. In Social Studies, we often use real concepts that can be related to the experiences of the learners. Sometimes, however, we use imaginary concepts as well. These according to Ogunsanya (1984) include;

Roles, society, environment, authority, leadership, followership, community, value, marriage, local government, self help, work, patriotism, loyalty, honour, glory, citizenship, interaction, religion, urbanization, rural movement, resources, conflict, interdependence, interrelationship, superstition, science, attitude, education, development, culture, and so on (P.19).

Concepts could also be taken as generalized ideas about classes of objects, events and even ideas themselves. Concepts group things into classes on the basis of their shared characteristics, and they help us to distinguish one class from another (Ajiboye, et al., 2005). Basically, what make up concepts are two viz; our experiences and facts. Concepts are therefore experiences proved by facts. The facts are not merely facts alone but they must be related facts and activities and experiences.

Put cogently, Adetoro, (2000) viewed concepts as abstract words or phrases that are employed in the classification of group of objects, ideas, people or events for example, the words family, nation, revolution, conflict, democracy, social change, civilization, reform socialization, to mention just a few. To him however, concepts vary in degree of abstractness and concreteness.

Akinlaye et al. (1996) identified four types of concepts as follows:

- **Concrete Concepts:** The concrete concepts are generalized ideas that we can think of, that group objects, people, events, etc. that share certain characteristics in common. Some of these ideas refer to concrete things around us e.g. table, chair, trees, vehicles, etc.
- **Abstract Concepts:** These are imaginary concepts, it relates to something that we cannot feel and taste e.g. co-operation and unity. We cannot perceive co-operation through our sense but infer that such activities or attitude denote the concept.
- **Concept of Activities:** We can also group activities as concept for example when we talk of 'studying', 'cooking', or 'planning', we are in effect dealing with concept about activities. Because cooking is an activity, a series of related behaviours organized into a sequence for the purpose of preparing the food.
- **Quality Concepts:** We also have concept of quality 'good', 'bad', 'better', 'poor', and so on. These are standard or criteria which we introduce into our classification of objects or activities. This concept commends values hence; we have 'good cooking' and 'bad cooking'.

Concepts are the categories we use to cluster information. Concepts organize specific information under one label. They are building blocks and links between facts and generalizations. The accomplishments of Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Alhaji Ahmadu Bello, Dr Nnamdi Azikwe, Chief Okoh Tiebo and Sir Herbert Macauley, Chief Obafemi Awolowo of Nigeria are facts. Together, these people may be categorized as heroes, a concept. To understand a generalization, students first must understand its component concepts. Consider this generalization: *People in communities are interdependent*. The student who does not know the meaning of two concepts, community and interdependence cannot understand the generalization.

Teaching Concepts

Research in teaching concepts has identified these general instructional strategies to be effective:

- Step 1: Identify a set of examples and place them in a logical order. Include at least one example that is a "best" example.
- Step 2: Devise materials or oral instructions with a set of cues, directions, questions, differences in the examples and non examples used.
- Step 3: Have students compare all the examples with the best example; provide feedback to students on their comparisons.

- Step 4: Focus student attention on the best, strongest, most clear example. What are its attributes and characteristics?
- Step 5: Ask students to develop a definition of the concept or state it for them.
- Step 6: Place the concept in relation to other student knowledge; try to attach this new information to existing student knowledge structures.
- Step 7: Give students examples and non examples to assess whether students understand the concept. Ask students to generate additional examples or apply the concept to new situations (SSCED, 2010).

What are Generalizations?

Generalizations are statements that show the relationship between or among concepts. For instance, the statement ‘cooperation among nations is essential for a stable world order and economy’ relates a number of concepts to each other – ‘cooperation’, ‘nations’, ‘stable’, ‘world-economic order’ (Ajiboye, et al., 2005; Akinlaye, et al., 1999). Also, in the statement ‘the village embraces the total culture of traditional Yoruba people’, there are a number of concepts that are related to the other. The statement expresses a relationship between the concepts ‘village’ and ‘culture’. Such relationships are called generalization and are expressed as declarative statements.

Simply put, Adetoro (2000) described generalizations as statements showing relationships between two or more concepts. For example, culture is learned; all societies are culturally mixed; human needs are unlimited and so on are generalizations. Generalizations vary in complexity and application. Some have universal application while others are localized. Some have universal validity while others are probable or very restricted in validity. Most of the Social Studies generalizations which are of social sciences origin are probabilistic in nature rather than universal (Okunloye, 1994 cited in Adetoro, 2000).

Generalizations are summary statements of relationships between concepts, summary statements of cause and effect, or summary statements of prediction of future relationships. They are powerful as they provide a way to consolidate information to make it more usable and easier to remember. Laws, principles and theories are all kinds of generalization. These generalizations require the connection of concepts by a relationship. These relationships can only be built with direct observational evidence and good logical reasoning. You can see that generalizations are “big ideas” while facts are specific and limited. Generalizations come from an analysis of many sets of facts. Before a generalization is proven, however, it is a hypothesis. Hypotheses are potential generalizations.

Generalizations are true and verifiable for all cases on the basis of the best evidence available. For example, if you were once beaten by a Nigerian Normad (a fact), you cannot generalize that all Nigerian Normads fight. If, however, you had evidence that all Nigerian Normads fight, you could make the generalization, “Nigerian Normads fight.” Generalizations organize and summarize information obtained from the analysis of facts. A generalization is usually a broad assertion. In contrast, a fact is a truth only about a particular incident or case (SSCED, 2010).

To Ogunsanya (1984), generalizations are just generally valid statements or expressions about people, places, or things that are yet to be tested or proved. As a rule therefore, generalizations are not always true for individual members of the group about which the generalization is made. Certain generalizations are however still describable and should be encouraged probably because they help to develop in students positive attitudes to other people, events or situations or because they teach some other virtues. Some of these desirable generalizations should be encouraged among Social Studies students for proper value reorientation;

- Culture to a very large extent influences the value system, attitudes, behaviours, beliefs and faith of a man.
- No society can experience true peace and happiness without the tempering and stabilizing influence of religion.
- The survival of a country depends on peaceful co-existence among its people.
- There can only be progress in a country if every individual is patriotic, dedicated and willing to contribute his quota to the development of the land.
- The eradication of tribalism, bribery and corruption will achieve national unity for a country.

However, there are generalizations or stereotypes that are undesirable and prejudicial and should therefore be discouraged. Some of these are, for instance; the Yorubas in Nigeria are ‘cunning’; the Ibos in Nigeria are too ‘money minded’; the Hausas in Nigeria are very ‘conservative’ and so on. Conceptually, in Social Studies we are usually concerned with four types of generalizations:

- 1) **Those that describe:** For instance, in any society there are more consumers than producers.
- 2) **Those that show cause and effect:** For instance, the closer one goes to the equator, the warmer will be the average temperature at sea level.

- 3) **Those that express a value principle:** For instance, individuals are not allowed to do things that endanger the health, safety, or well-being of others.
- 4) **Those that express a law or theory:** For instance, the economic development of a country requires domestic savings that can provide enough capital to finance the investments needed to guarantee an adequate rate of growth.

Using Concepts and Generalizations in Social Studies

Concepts rely on facts, but facts are not meaningful except as they relate to concepts and generalizations. It is all a complex, interdependent structure, each layer relying on the layer above and below for support and cohesion. Pull one component out, and the structure collapses (SSCED, 2010). This is diagrammatized in the structure of knowledge as indicated below:

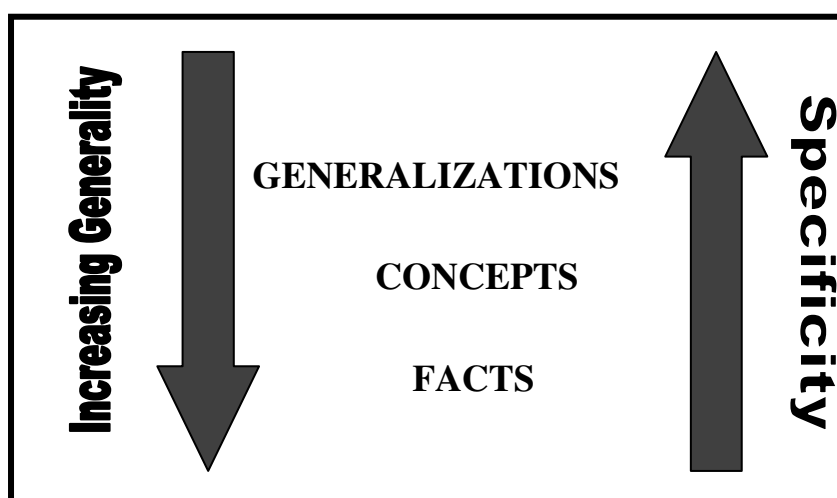


Fig 2: The Structure of Knowledge

Source: Armstrong (1989)

The above diagram leads to a general rule, thus, students must be given lots of opportunities to move through the structure of knowledge, that is, to move from facts to concepts and to generalizations. Specifically, Bruner (1960) remarked that every discipline has a structure which is made up of those fundamental concepts and generalizations, pertaining to the area the discipline are concerned with. This is because the structure of geography is made up of all those major concepts and generalizations relating to our physical environment while those major concepts and generalizations relating to social interactions and social institutions would make up the structure of sociology.

However, in selecting and organizing Social Studies content based on structure, the entire arts and social sciences curricula are surveyed and a number of key concepts and generalizations covering the whole area of the study are developed (Ogunsanya, 1984). Thus, from each of these concepts and generalizations, current issues and problems in the society are then generated. Topics are then formulated and lessons prepared from these concepts and generalizations for teaching and learning purposes. The use of concepts and generalizations in selecting Social Studies content is clearly illustrated in the table provided below

Table 1: Concepts and Generalizations in Social Studies Content

Themes	Major Concepts	Some Generalizations
Urbanization in Nigeria.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural/Urban Alienation. • Central Place. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The process of urbanization is continuous and has no visible end in sight. 2) Rural-urban migration is slowing down the pace of rural development in Nigeria. 3) Urban problems are many and are usually difficult to solve.
Family and Kinship.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nuclear family. • Extended family. • Life space. • Household census. • Life circles. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) There is no society on record now or in the past, which has no family group in one form or another. 2) The nuclear and extended family systems are two ideal types of family grouping based on different cultures. 3) All families have certain obligations to perform on their members. 4) The family system is not static. It changes with time. 5) All members of the family are interdependent.
Culture and Identity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural Universality. • Cultural Diversity. • Language. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Culture is learned not inborn 2) All society are culturally mixed 3) Culture is universal and every society has its own culture. 4) Culture is full of diversity 5) Language is an aspect of human culture.

Source: Modified from Ogunsanya (1984)

Benefits of Using Concepts and Generalizations in Selecting and Organizing Social Studies Contents

Concepts in Social Studies assist the teachers to define the subject matter or discriminate among the subject matter of investigation. It serves as framework for the elaboration and organization of facts for easier and better understanding. It is also useful for the amplification and application of facts, attributes or knowledge, from one situation or locality to another in Social Studies lessons (Adetoro, 2000: 28).

Using such concepts as continuity and change: cause and effect; interdependence and so on gives students a frame of reference for analyzing the past and present human conditions. For instance, focusing on interdependence can illuminate and give new meaning to breakthroughs in transportation and communication that have brought communities and nations closer together. Also, understanding the context of interdependence in Social Studies helps students have a broader content for dealing with the phenomenon that what happens today in one part of the world can have important implications for others in distant places.

Generalizations on the other hand enable pupils to understand the relationship between two or more concepts. They also help to build theories for Social Studies especially when two or more generalizations are combined together and framed in lucid phraseology (Adetoro, 2000). Even generalization help the pupils to gain better understanding of man-environmental relationship in time and space for practical utility in Social Studies.

Consequently, by focusing student learning to concepts and generalizations, we help them to make sense of the world. We combine ideals and help them interpret the great quality of information in Social Studies. From this perspective, facts become meaningful because they support or refute generalization. If they are meaningful, they are memorable.

Concepts and generalizations play an important role in helping us or come to grasp with realities. They help in tremendously reducing the complexity of the environment. This function of concepts and generalizations has therefore accorded it a prominence place in the teaching of Social Studies which itself is primarily concerned with fostering a better understanding of our environment.

Linking the advantages of concepts and generalization in organizing social studies content to the objectives of the subject, Akinlaye, et al (1996) argued that it is possible to identify themes in terms of social problems and issues and then go on to identify those central concepts and generalizations that relate to each theme. The Nigerian primary and junior secondary school social studies curricula seem to reflect this kind of arrangement. In both of these approaches, certain significant outcomes in the learners are intended. These outcomes can be summarized from the objectives thus;

- **Knowledge:** facts, information, concepts and generalizations about the learner physical and social world, as well as those of other peoples and races.
- **Skills and competencies:** these include intellectual and manipulative skills e.g. thinking critically, solving problems, finding information, giving directions, interpreting maps, being creative etc.
- **Values:** such as moral, religious, economic, vocational and political.
- **Attitudes:** e.g. open-mindedness, concern for others, honesty, civic responsibility, tolerance, co-operation, respect for individuals and property etc.

Conclusion

Organizing Social Studies content using concepts and generalizations involves identifying all those key facts, skills, values, attitudes, concepts and generalizations in the existing disciplines and structuring the contents around those that are of more immediate relevance to our realities. Thus, key concepts and generalizations should therefore be identified in each discipline by the teachers or and curriculum experts and used as organizing centres for instructing information for practical utility and comprehensive knowledge.

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