

Curriculum Feuding and Implementation Challenges: The Case of Senior High School (SHS) Social Studies in Ghana

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Abstract

The subject Social Studies in the Senior High Schools (SHS) curricula (3 & 4 year policy) in Ghana is taught mostly by graduate teachers from the country's two teacher preparation universities-University of Cape Coast and University of Education (i.e. UCC and UEW) and graduates from other universities. Documentary analysis of their programmes reveals differences in how the subject is structured to prepare teachers to teach it at the SHS level.

Qualitatively, an interpretative design was used. Documents of Social Studies course structures were analysed vis-à-vis the SHS Social Studies syllabus. The study revealed that: (a) Teacher Training Institutions (i.e. UCC & UEW) subscribe and use a particular conception of Social Studies curriculum for the production of Social Studies education graduates; and (b) Although social studies is seen as an integrated body of knowledge, there is an issue of acceptable level of integration. It was recommended that Social Studies curricula of both universities should be harmonized to focus more on attitudes and values cultivation as well as skills development of students.

Key-words: Conceptions of Social Studies. Social Studies curriculum. Social Studies curriculum implementation.

1. Introduction and Background

Discussion on Social Studies thought in the United States of America and Britain without Africa as a continent may be seen as an incomplete exercise because, Social Studies growth and development has been a universal phenomenal (Lawal & Oyeleye, 2003). A close look at the development of historical thought of Social Studies in the U.S and Britain will reveal that, it has had a great influence on Social Studies thought in Africa (Lawal 2003). The growth of Social Studies across the different parts of the world has been informed by a variety of reasons and factors. For instance, it has been used as a partial solution for social problem in many countries of the world. In British, Social Studies was used to legitimize the teaching of social sciences particularly sociology, while preparing students for their role in the society. In United States of America (USA), Social Studies has continued its primary function of preparing students for effective citizenship in democratic society and instilling patriotic ideals in the young ones (Kissock, 1981).

Social Studies, as a single school subject, is a relatively new discipline, in Ghana and many other countries, even though it has been around for considerable number of years. It is new because most of the subjects/disciplines in the school curriculum, often referred to as traditional disciplines, predate social studies by decades and even centuries. It is also new because it has still not developed any body of knowledge of its own (Kissock, 1981) and still relies on concepts and generalisations from existing Social Science and Humanity disciplines.

Among the African nations, Social Studies has been used to improve the self image of people in the society after a long colonial rule and heritage. In Ghana, it was aimed at understand the interrelationships between the social and the physical environment and their impact on the development of Ghana; appreciate the impact of history on current and future development efforts of the country; appreciate the various components of the environment and how these could be maintained to ensure sustainable development; recognize the major challenges facing Ghana and be able to develop basic knowledge and skills for dealing with such challenge; understand the dynamics of development in the world and their impact on development in Ghana; develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for personal growth, peaceful co-existence, and respect for peoples of other nations; and develop a sense of national consciousness and national identity (CRDD, 2007).

Over the past several years, Social Studies has become a more visible school subject and conception of learning Social Studies has evolved from doing and knowing to experiencing and making meaning. The tacit and piecemeal curriculum that has long characterized the Social Studies classroom seems to be gradually giving way to a more coherent and integrated

set of objectives, benchmarks, and performance indicators. This approach is goal oriented with an emphasis on learner outcomes: the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and disposition to action that teachers wish to develop in students (Farris, 2001: 59-60).

The above citation precisely describes the evolution of Social Studies, as a single discipline of study, among the school curriculum in Ghana. It has evolved from a collection of specific History and Geography topics, which used to characterize the early Social Studies curriculum, into an issue centred (trans-disciplinary) subject.

In much of Africa, the introduction of Social Studies as part of the school's curriculum was preceded by the formation of the African Social Studies Programme (ASSP) in 1968 (Kissock, 1981). The introduction of Social Studies in Ghana thereafter was preceded by a follow up of Educational Conference of Mombasa in Winneba, Ghana, in 1969 during which it was adopted as part of the school curriculum. It was first introduced in the Primary Schools in 1972, where it was called Environmental/Social Studies. Also in 1976, all Teacher-Training Colleges in Ghana were asked to start the preparation of Basic School teachers. The above continued to be the situation until the new Educational Reforms of 1987.

Social Studies was introduced and confined to the Junior Secondary Schools (JSS), now Junior High School (JHS) and the teacher-training institutions. The subject in the primary schools became known as Environmental Studies. In 1998 Social Studies in Ghana underwent another evolution or perhaps a revolution, on this occasion, with its introduction in the Senior Secondary Schools (SSS), now Senior High School (SHS). This was occasioned by the recommendation of the 1994 Educational Review Committee, which asked for the introduction of Social Studies to replace Life Skills at the SSS level to provide the basis for continuation of learning, in the discipline, from the JSS to the SSS level.

This committee, however, succeeded in transforming social studies from amalgam (Kissock, 1981; Quartey, 1984; Barnes, 1982) of discrete traditional social science disciplines, which it used to be, to one that is issues centred (Farris, 2001; Noddings, 2000; Kissock, 1981) and problem solving in nature (Martorrela, 1994; Banks, 1990; CRDD, 1998). This is because the panel that designed the new SSS syllabus was different, both in composition and orientation, from the panel that designed the JSS Social Studies curriculum in 1987.

It is, particularly, important to note that social studies is also a discipline/course of study at the two teacher preparation universities in Ghana. These are the University of Cape Coast (UCC), which was the first to introduce it as a programme of study, and the University of Education, Winneba (UEW), which followed later. The current situation in the social studies front, in Ghana, is that whereas the UCC still runs the course as an amalgam of sociology, history, geography and economics, the UEW has theirs reflecting the issue centred and problem solving curriculum, as introduced in the SSSs now SHS, since 1998.

It should be noted that the differences in the conception of Social Studies are not confined to Ghana alone, but do exist in other countries, where they have generated much debate. The debate about how social studies should be conceived or defined is very much held within the context of what is referred to as curriculum politics (Kelly, 1999; Giroux, 2000; Coulby, 2000), where opposing and competing social forces, educators and scholars, among others vie for the primacy of their ideas in and control over the school's curriculum.

Therefore the problem under review is that the aim of Social Studies in Ghana is Citizenship Education (CRDD, 2010); however, documentary evidence on the Social Studies curricula of the two universities, UCC and UEW, seems doubtful and tends to show conceptual differences in what the subject is. Therefore the purpose of the study was to draw attention to the curriculum implementation challenges of Senior High School Social Studies in Ghana as a result of the differences in institutional curriculum conception of the subject. The study therefore sought to answer these questions (1) Are there significant differences in the curriculum conception of Social Studies at UCC and UEW? and (2) how are the possible curriculum feuding influencing Social Studies implementation?

2. Review of Relevant Literature on Teachers' Conception of Subject on their Classroom Practices

Different studies on conception about teaching and learning in other fields of study like the Sciences and the Social Sciences indicate that conception has much influence on teaching and learning. Hodson (1999:3) stated that "when teachers are presented with a particular teaching/learning task, set within a distinctive educational context, a unique learning context is created". This explains the teachers' distinctive personal framework of understanding. These confirm what Shiundu and Mohammed (1994) describe as the influence of unique traditions of the institutions that train the teachers on the framework of their conception about whatever subject they learn during their initial training.

The scientific context in which this is placed is what Chandler (2005) describes as selectivity and perceptual constancy, a crucial factor that according to him shapes the teachers' perception towards the teaching of their subject of specialization. According to Chandler (2005) factors that influence teachers' acceptance or rejection of an idea include perception of relevance and self interest. Hodson (1993) and Kyle (1999) stress a similar view by saying that in many institutions, impressions are reinforced by a heavy reliance on didactic teaching styles in which teachers spend considerable time on "cook book exercises" designed to teach a particular pre-determined

outcome. Dutton (2004) adds that pedagogues generally teach the way they were taught. Phillips (2005) suggested that in the absence of formal teaching qualifications, many pedagogues teach in the didactic way that they were taught. Shiundu and Mohammed (1994) emphatically remark that it is all too often unfortunate but true that teachers teach the way they are taught. According to Shiundu and Mohammed (1994:6), "One fundamental problem of the existing preserves of Social Studies teacher training programmes in many countries is that they have very little or no demonstrable relevance for the functions and responsibilities which teachers are expected to perform". This problem is reflected either in the makeup of the curriculum or in its deliberations. Akinlaye (2003:15) therefore clearly stated, "It is ethically and professionally appropriate that teachers must understand what 'teaching and learning' process of Social Studies is all about". Brown (1992:3) asserts that, teachers' perception about their subject greatly influence their teaching and does so negatively". Sharing the same view, Akinlaye (2002:4) asserts that "what teachers' believe to be good instructional content to teach and appropriate methods to use in the classroom are greatly influenced by teachers' perception of the subject". This implies that teachers who are indoctrinated with a given concept will be difficult to be de-indoctrinated and this will influence their teaching.

Studies conducted by Almarza (2001), and Chiodo and Byford (2004) also reveal that, it is the teacher who is the key to what Social Studies means to students, because teachers' belief of the subject Social Studies, in turn affect the way they teach and transmit knowledge to students. The finding from the studies of Evans (2004) and Todd (2005) similarly indicate that the decisions of what to teach our children under Social Studies education often shift and are dependent on the influence of the perception of the teacher about the subject.

Shavelson & Stern (1981) and Tillema (2000) believe that teachers' conception greatly impact on their instructional decisions in the classroom. With this, Borg (2003:81) suggests, "teachers are active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex practically-oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs". Furthermore, and as noted by Shavelson and Stern (1981), what teachers do in the classroom is said to be governed by what they believe and these conception often serve to act as a filter through which instructional judgments and decisions are made.

The review shows that teachers hold the key to sound educational system of any nation and that the educational standard of teachers, their quality, and competency and above all the conception they form about a subject need to be taken into prominence. This implies that teachers' curriculum conception will probably influence the way an educational package is delivered to students with the aim of fulfilling individual and societal goals.

3. Methodology

Interpretative design was adopted for the analysis of documents of Social Studies programme of UCC and UEW, vis-à-vis the SHS Social Studies syllabus. These were analysed based on the following three comparative analysis process created by the researchers: (1) The conception and rationale for offering the Social Studies programme at UCC and UEW; (2) Content of UCC and the UEW Social Studies curricula and how they fall in line and differ?; and (3) Implementation challenges of Social Studies in Ghana.

4.1 Differences in the Conception of Social Studies in Ghana

4.1.1 Conception and Rationale for offering the Social Studies programme at UCC and UEW

According to the Social Studies course structure of University of Education, Winneba (UEW) (2009), the programme is run by the Social Studies Department, whilst the Social Studies course structure of University of Cape Coast (UCC) (DASSE, 2008) depicted that the programme is offered in the Department of Arts and Social Science Education (DASSE).

Document of Social Studies course structure gathered from DASSE, UCC shows that the overall goal of the programme at the university is to produce trained and qualified teachers who have adequate subject matter knowledge and can employ critical and reflective thinking in their analysis of educational issues in general, and curricular and pedagogical issues in particular, in chosen subject areas. However, document on Social Studies course structure gathered from the Department of Social Studies Education, UEW shows the following rationale for setting the programme: to equip students with relevant knowledge which will form the basis for enquiry into issues and problems of society; develop in students, skills and competencies required for teaching Social / Environmental Studies; equip students with research skills used for the collection and analyses of data as well as drawing up necessary conclusions from them; equip students with the skills for identifying societal problems and developing techniques of resolving them; develop in students the habit of obtaining information on current issues and the ability for critical thinking; and inculcate in students the attributes of good citizenship.

The University of Cape Coast has the following as its objectives for Social Studies: train teachers in Social Studies; produce teachers and facilitators who will effectively implement the education reform programme of the governments; promote basic and applied research in Social Studies; disseminate research findings / information in Social Studies; and prepare students for higher academic and professional pursuits. The documents gathered from UEW show that the aim of the programme is to equip students with relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes

that will enable them to teach Environmental/Social Studies at the Basic, SHS and Colleges of Education and/or undertake the supervisory responsibilities under the District Directorates of Education.

From the documents on Social Studies course structures one can deduce that Social Studies at UCC is meant to produce trained and qualified teachers who have adequate subject matter knowledge in chosen subject areas: Economics; History; Sociology (which is not a teaching subject at the pre-tertiary level) and Geography, whilst UEW shows that the programme is to equip students with relevant knowledge which form the basis for enquiry into issues and how to solve one's problem and that of society; inculcate in students the attributes of good citizenship.

The above suggests that students from UCC are trained to be masters in the discrete subjects in the social sciences (i.e. Geography, History, Economics, and Sociology). Meanwhile, sociology is not a teaching subject at the pre-tertiary level where students are prepared to teach. At UEW, students are taught to be problem solvers in social studies as a single subject which is problem-oriented and theme based, and trans-disciplinary in nature as depicted in their course structures.

4.1.2 Content of UCC and the UEW Social Studies curricula and how they fall in line and differ

Documentary evidences gathered from the two universities show some similarities and wide differences in curricula structure. At UEW students are introduced to Social Studies as single subject which is problem solving and theme based, and trans-disciplinary in nature. Students of UCC are rather introduced to the discrete subjects with a multidisciplinary approach in the social sciences like Economics, Geography, History and Sociology. The following are some examples of packaged courses of UCC Social Studies programme, taught in separate subject approach in the social sciences: Economics based courses are (Elements of Economics II (Macro); Economy of Ghana and others); Geography packed courses (Introduction to Earth Science; Geomorphology and Oceanography I; Remote Sensing and Cartography and others); History packed courses (North Africa, AD 1600-1830 and others); sociology packed courses (Introduction to Sociology II (Man and Society) and others); Professional development courses (Teaching Social Studies; Teaching Geography; and others) (*Culled from document on social studies programme, Department of Arts and Social Science Education (DASSE), University of Cape Coast, 2008*).

Social Studies programme courses from level 100 to level 400 at University of Education, Winneba (UEW) show wide differences when compared with the UCC Social Studies course structure. The following are some examples of packaged courses of UEW Social Studies programme taught in a holistic, theme based, problem solving and trans-disciplinary approach and can be summarized under three aspects namely: Professional development courses (Skills and Techniques of Teaching Social Studies; Religion in Social Studies; and others); Issue-oriented or theme-based courses (Social Policy in Ghana; Resources and Economic Development; Democracy and Nation Building; Ethnicity and National Integration; and others); and Curriculum and Assessment courses (Development of the Social Studies Curriculum; Assessment Techniques in Social Studies and others) (*Culled from document on social studies programme, Department of Social Studies Education, University of Education, Winneba, 2009*).

This brings to the fore the controversy surrounding the nature and content of Social Studies. At UCC all students are supposed to pursue Geography to the final year. Sociology is dropped at level hundred, History at level two hundred and Economics at level three hundred. Social Studies as a subject is introduced at level three hundred at UCC. Here, Social Studies mode of delivery perpetuated in a discrete subjects approach in the social sciences may let students conceptualize the subjects as amalgam. This may confuse students on whether the subject should be viewed as problem solving or amalgamation of the social sciences, as the course structure depicts. This may further confuse student-teachers as to what Social Studies is supposed to be and how they should impart to their SHS students.

Documentary evidence gathered also shows that, at UEW students are offered the opportunity to choose a second area of specialization from Political Science, History, Economics and Geography, whilst at UCC Social Studies students are mandated to finish their course having Geography as their second area.

Also, the nature and content of Social Studies of the two universities are at variance with each other. Whilst the UCC Social Studies programme depicted content packed in the discrete subjects from the social sciences (i.e. Economics, History, Geography, and Sociology) which is multi-disciplinary in nature, the UEW social studies programme depicted holistic content packed, and is theme based, problem-solving oriented and trans-disciplinary in nature.

4.2 Social Studies Curriculum Feuding and Implementation Challenges

4.2.1 Implementation Challenges of Social Studies in Ghana

With the implementation challenges of Social Studies in Ghana there was the need to ascertain whether the course structures of University of Cape Coast (UCC) and University of Education, Winneba (UEW) fall in line with the Senior Secondary / High School Social Studies syllabi.

There are two SHS programmes running in the country concurrently; hence two teaching syllabi for Social Studies at that level. These are the 2010 teaching syllabus for the three year (3) running programme and 2007 teaching syllabus for the four (4) year SHS programme. *The SHS syllabi were examined based on the rationale for teaching; general aims; and the scope of content of social studies.* The designers of both Social Studies Syllabus for the three year and the four year SHS programme (2010 & 2007) respectively see the rationale for teaching Social Studies as the study of society and its problems. They believe that it should prepare the individual by equipping him or her with knowledge about the culture and ways of life of their society, its problems, its values and its hopes for the future.

The subject is multi-disciplinary and takes its source from geography, history, sociology, psychology, economics, civic education and science (CRDD, 2010). The essential knowledge and principles from these disciplines are integrated into a subject that stands on its own and the topics from this syllabus reflect the problems of the individual and society (CRDD, 2010). Examples are self-identity, responsible parenthood, and peace building and conflict resolution. This means that the essential elements of the knowledge and principles from the various disciplines in the social sciences should be integrated into a subject that stands on its own in a single subject that will make it to be seen as problem oriented, theme based and trans-disciplinary in nature and not as the discrete subjects in the social sciences. Here the UCC Social Studies programme saw it right but the acceptable level of integration of the social sciences is the problem as the various parts are clearly seen as discrete subjects in the social sciences like Economics, Geography, History and Sociology. So, it is virtually a misconception and is not in line with the syllabus.

The general aims and the scope of content of the current SHS Social Studies syllabuses (2007 & 2010) reflects the tools needed by individual to solve personal and societal problems. These fall in line with the UEW Social Studies course structure as documents gathered on the course structure show that the programme is problem solving oriented, theme based and trans-disciplinary in nature, whilst UCC Social Studies course content shows distinct subjects in the social sciences (i.e. Economics, Geography, History, and Sociology). The courses examine under the UCC programme are mainly facts, concepts and topics bootlegged from the discrete subjects in the social sciences.

According to CRDD, (2010) The integration in Social Studies is to be achieved in the three sections of the syllabus each of which focuses respectively on: Governance, Politics and Stability; the Environment; and Social and Economic Development. This shows that courses in Social Studies of both universities should be centred on issues around the Environment; Government, Politics and Stability; and Social and Economic Development that will help the pupil develop a broader perspective of Ghana and the world. From the syllabi, it then shows that the integration of Social Studies should be trans-disciplinary in nature and must not be shown in separate subjects in the social sciences but should be theme-based and problem-solving oriented. With this, the UEW Social Studies course structure saw it right, whilst the UCC Social Studies course structure is seen in discrete subjects from the social sciences. Here it is deduced that both universities see it as integration of the social sciences but there is a problem of acceptable level of integration.

UCC see the integration as individual subject areas. The level of integration is the source of confusion because every subject borrows from other subjects just like Social Studies. But the facts and ideas borrowed by Social Studies are so utilized that they assist in producing reflective, competent and concerned citizen who can live effectively in the society (Martorella, 1994). The UCC Social Studies programme does not just borrow facts but bootlegs whole topics from History, Geography, Economics, and Sociology. This created the source of confusion. A teacher who has an in-depth knowledge in Social Studies will not present facts from the social sciences but the distillate part which must rather be used to solve threatening individual problems and that of society. This distillate part will develop the positive attitudes, values and skills needed to make critical and informed decisions in life as responsible citizens.

5. Conclusions

Teacher Training Institutions subscribe and use a particular conception of Social Studies curriculum for the production of Social Studies education graduates as revealed in the comparative analysis of Social Studies teacher training curricula of UCC and UEW.

The curriculum feuding is as a result of UCC subscribing to, and using traditional subject-centred or discrete subject perspective (i.e. geography, economics, history, sociology, etc) with a multidisciplinary approach, whilst UEW subscribes to and uses holistic, theme based, problem solving and trans-disciplinary approach.

Although Social Studies is seen as an integrated body of knowledge of the social sciences, there is an issue of acceptable level of integration. This will result in teachers having varied conceptions about Social Studies as an amalgamation of the social sciences, problem solving or citizenship education.

6. Implications for Teaching Social Studies

Teacher training universities having different modes of delivering Social Studies may tend to influence students as to what the meaning of Social Studies is, its contents and why it is worth studying. With this, much is needed

to assist Social Studies teachers to be abreast with the nature and the content of Social Studies in a harmonized subject matter required to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

Students-teachers had not yet received the most basic orientation of the 2010 and the 2007 Social Studies syllabuses used for the three year and the four year SHS respectively. It was indicated that the current Social Studies syllabus is not taught as a course at both universities. The implication is students-teachers will graduate and teach based on the conception they have about the subject. The varied conception can be addressed by introducing the Social Studies syllabus in use as a course of study in Social Studies curriculum for student-teachers of UCC and UEW. This will curb the reluctance of teachers using the syllabus as a result of proliferation of Social Studies textbooks on the markets.

7. Recommendations

That, in order to build a common knowledge base for teachers of the subject, the government through the Ministry of Education, Ghana Education Service (GES), Vice Chancellors of UCC and UEW and their respective academic boards should come together and set the bench mark for the purpose, methods and the theoretical foundations of Social Studies curricula for all training institutions for the training of Social Studies teachers for the bachelor of Social Studies education, masters of education and the master of philosophy degrees. This will forge a better ground for the training of teachers in the field of Social Studies.

Furthermore, at least a three credit hour course be designed and mounted on the current Senior High Schools Social Studies syllabus for students as part of their programme of study. This will help teachers to become familiar with the content of the syllabus, making it easy in their selection of valid content, setting of appropriate objectives in their teaching and even the mode of using appropriate assessment tools.

Finally, to ensure its effectiveness or success in improving the educational system there must be monitoring in curriculum design, and its implementation. Policy could fail if there are lapses at any of the three levels, namely, curriculum design, implementation and monitoring. In this study, however, the improvement of attitudes must be seen as the hallmark of Social Studies programme at the universities. This can be done with an increase in supervisory role carried out by the universities to see how their products are faring and to encourage them to do better. These could help the programme to succeed. If importance is attached to Social Studies then resources already invested in its planning and implementation in Ghana, must be followed by programme review and remedial measures taken early, so as to make it more effective and viable.

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