

## Socio-Cultural Factors Affecting the Teaching and Learning of Social Studies in Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

Many studies have been carried out on cultural variables that promotes the teaching and learning of social studies, but little or no emphasis have been made on those socio-cultural factor that inhibits it. The thrust of this work therefore is to examine those socio-cultural factors in Nigeria that affects social studies teaching and learning. Family/ community background of the child was looked at, cultural, language and religious differences in Nigeria's heterogeneous society are also such factors that hinder social studies teaching and learning. It was recommended that multicultural education should be conceptualized into the school content, social studies teachers should handle religious and cultural topics objectively, and teachers should be analytical and impartial in approaching such sensitive issues. Also, cultural laws should be honestly explained to children if there must be an improvement in student's achievement in social studies.

**Keywords:** socio-cultural, teaching, learning, social studies.

### Introduction

It is believed that the development of social studies in any country has a peculiar circumstances based on that country's socio-cultural experiences. In Nigeria, among the factors that gave birth to social studies is the need for national integration and rehabilitation after the civil war (Osakwe and Ifedjere 1993). This basic fact is understood better when the national educational aims and the objectives of teaching social studies is x-rayed.

According to National Policy on Education (FRN 2004) the first National Educational policy on education is the inculcation of national consciousness and national unity, economic development, international understanding and ethnic tolerance. Social studies philosophical orientations are focused towards the individual, state and nation. It was in recognition of these basic orientations that the Federal Government directed that social studies be taught as a core subject in primary, secondary and teachers training colleges as well as the universities.

Nigeria as a heterogeneous society is made up of about 450 ethnic nationalities, and this Nigerians belong to different socio-cultural groups. Culture is a compendium of man's way of life, language and medium of communication (Ireyefoju 2010:236). Culture of a people in a nation depicts their attitude, philosophies, skills, values, knowledge and predisposition to unfolding events and issues in their social environment (Edinyang, Mezeiobi, Igba and Yaro 2014). Social studies education advocates cultural accommodation, utilization, cultural knowledge acquisition through content of instruction and patriotic need for achieving Nigeria's national goals despite our cultural diversities. For any society to survive, its culture must be passed on to teach successive generations in such a way that the claims of the society are given priority over the wants of individuals (Bullivant 1981:8). Through social studies education, culture is being promoted through the promotion of environmental education. Against this background Ikwemelu (1994:153) expressed "man cannot be isolated from his culture, social studies education that ignores the culture of people is as irrelevant as it is deficient".

Regrettably, social studies education is not such a smooth sailing enterprise in Nigeria schools due to some socio-cultural factors at play. The thrust of this paper therefore, is to examine those socio-cultural factors that affect the teaching and learning of social studies.

Socio-cultural factors are the larger scale forces within societies and culture that affects the thoughts, behaviors and feelings of individual members of those societies and cultures. Example of socio-cultural factors include language, law, aesthetics (appearance), religion, values, attitudes, social organizations, family, community a person's role or status among others (Free Psychology Newsletter). These issues can become very important for any nation because such nation needs to target their promotions based on the socio-cultural factors that are at play. Socio-cultural theorist argue that individuals cannot be considered in isolation from their social and historical context so therefore is necessary to look at the society and the development occurring at a given time (Regeluth 1995).

## **Conceptual framework**

### **Social studies**

Inyang –Abia Esu (2004) posited that social studies is an interdisciplinary subject which enables the learners to acquire wide knowledge of the surrounding complex phenomena and forces that influence man in his society. In line with the above definition, Edinyang and Mezieobi (2013) posits that social studies has been defined in Nigeria as an integrated field of study that probes man's environmental relationships and imbues man with high level intellectual skills, social skills and competencies germane to solving man's environmental diverse problems for better and effective living.

Social studies is a program of study which a society uses to instill in students or learners the knowledge, skills, attitudes and actions it considers important in the relationships human beings have with each other, their world and themselves (Kissock 1981). Ezegebe maintains that social studies education has a primary objective of helping to produce good citizens who are of great benefit to the Nigerian society.

Bullivant (1993) defines culture as a group's program for survival in and adaptation to its environment. The cultural program consists of knowledge, concepts and values shared by group members through systems of communication. Culture also consists of the shared beliefs, symbols and interpretations within a human group. The essence of culture is not its artifacts, tools, or other tangible cultural elements but how the members of a group interpret, use, distinguish one people from another in modernized societies; it is not material objects and other tangible aspects of human societies (Banks,1994a, 1994b). People within a culture usually interpret the meaning of symbols, artifacts and behaviour in similar ways.

Learning as defined by Denga (2002:13) is a change in behavior or performance, which is as a result of experience and practice, and which makes individual face later situations differently. This change in behavior or performance should lead to observable or demonstrable improvement if learning has indeed taken place.

In the same vein, Isangedighi (2011) sees learning as a relatively permanent change in behavior as a result of practice and experience. The desire or wish of all parents is that their children should go to school and acquire qualitative education that can equip them with skills, knowledge and good character that can make them competent, well adjusted and effective citizens. The knowledge acquired can equip the children to understand and solve problems of life. Good character will make children acceptable in the society and grow in the nurture and fear of God, enjoying interpersonal relation with fellowmen wherever they find themselves (Denga and Akuto 2004).

Parents, the community and nation at large expect their offspring to benefit from a positive change in behavior as a result of their exposure to teaching. Effective teaching and learning of social studies brings about development not only to the individual learner but to the society in which such an individual lives and operates. Learning in individual is a complex phenomenon that depends on a multitude of factors such as the teacher, the learner, the institutional environment among others. For learning to take place effectively, there has to be an interaction among the various factors.

### **Socio-Cultural theory by Lev Vygotsky**

This is an emerging theory in psychology that looks at the important contributions that society makes to individual development. This theory stresses the interaction between developing people and the culture in which they live. This theory grew from the work of seminal psychologist Lev Vygotsky who believed that parents, caregivers, peers and the culture at large were responsible for the development of higher order functions. According to him, "every function in the child's cultural development appears in twice; first, on the social level, and later on the individual level; first between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapyschological). This theory focuses on how adult and peers influence individual learning and also how cultural beliefs and attitudes affects instruction and learning. This is better explained by Mazieobi in Edinyang et-al (2014) and its significance as summarized below.

### **The significance of sustaining Nigeria's social and cultural relationship**

1. Promoting national unity through interactive social relationships among citizens in sports, arts or cultural activities.
2. Encouraging the spirit of nationalism and patriotism among the youth and peace loving Nigerians.
3. Showcasing the rich cultural heritage of Nigeria.
4. Sensitizing the message of interrelationships in a diverse multi-ethnic society.
5. Building of bridges and values against national antagonism, destruction of lives and properties.
6. Training the youths for leadership with skills of nation building and accommodation of other ethnic groups.

7. Achieving national integration which is ideal for sustainable democratic governance in Nigeria and to broaden the boundaries of Nigeria's culture or at best promote cultural education (Edinyang et-al 2014).

Socio-cultural factors that affects the teaching and learning of social studies.

a. **The home/ community background**

The home is the foundation from which learning activities of any child take off. Sociologist refers to the home as the bedrock of the socialization process, which implies learning. The type of home environment a child is born sets the limit for life's adjustment (Isangedighi 2011). In this discussion, aspects of home background are limited to family socio-economic status, parent's educational status and parental discipline, adult predominance, differences in language and the culture of community where the child comes.

Many studies have shown that family characteristics can significantly affect children development and school achievement. The impoverish status of parents makes it difficult for them to parent their children adequately. This is best explain in Denga and Denga (2007). "Poverty as a notorious social, economic and psychological factor can be held accountable for poor parenting in developing countries". Parent's poverty makes them subject their children to indecent behaviour s such as petty trading, malnutrition, hard labour, health risk, poor or no education among others. Some parents condone or encourage prostitution among their female children as a source of generating revenue for the survival of the family. Beyond the immediate family, the community in which the child lives has a great influence to the teaching and learning of social studies. High levels of poverty within the community can adversely affect children's development regardless of the quality of individual family environment. This is confirmed by a study by Boody and colleagues (2001) who studied the influence of neighborhood characteristics on 10 and 11 years old African American children in Iowa and Georgia. Their data suggest that children who lived in disadvantaged communities, whether urban or rural were more likely to affiliate with antisocial peers than were children living in more affluence communities. Affiliating with antisocial peers had a negative effect on children's academic progress even when those children came from nurturing supportive families.

In the same vein Swanson (2004) examine how community poverty affected high school completion for different ethnic groups. He found that high school graduation rates for African American students were more adversely affected by high poverty environments, than were graduation rates of whites or Asian American students.

More so, Asuquo, Owan, Inaia and Okon (2001) have indicated that children from higher socio-economic families tend to perform and achieve better educationally than children from lower socio-economic families. According to them, according to them higher socio-economic families are capable of providing learning material thus conducive environment for learning and growth.

Education of the parents particularly of mothers has some relationship with their children school learning ability. Educated parents are able to identify with the school learning experiences of their children, and therefore able to lend the necessary assistance to them. Uneducated parents lack the capacity to assist in the supervision of school assignments, or proper counseling of their school going children (Colclough, Al-Samarai, Rose and Tembon 2003). Also parental discipline is another factor –children who learn to accept parental authority will also accept teacher's authority in school (Isangedighi 2011).

b. **Culture of the society**

Culture is relative; some behaviors that stand condemned in one culture are approved and encouraged in another culture. For example, Denga et-al (2007) explained, "when the Ancient Greeks were building up toughness, smartness and bravery among children, they would send them out deliberately to steal from their neighbours. It was a serious offence for a child to be caught. A child was punished not because he went out to steal, but because he was not smart enough to steal and escape.

Some sub-cultures regard aggressive behaviour as acts of self defense and toughness (child militancy). Parents therefore train their children to be tough and aggressive in order to survive in the midst of violent ethnic groups. In the midst of plural marriages where there are more children than food supply, children must learn to eat at a speed that will give them an adage over the weak and slow eaters when all of them have to eat from a common fund of food supply (Denga et-al 2007).

All this teachings are contrary to that of social studies; which serve as a tool to fostering unity in diversity. Social studies teach students to be sufficiently tolerant of each other so that people of different religious beliefs can live together in peace and harmony. This will also negate Ezema (2001) who noted that with social studies education, the students are able to appreciate the need for cooperation, justice, fair play, tolerance, honesty and

patience. All which are indispensable for the well being, progress and general development of every human community.

The traditional Nigeria society was predominant an adult world where adults dictated the tone of life, attitudes and behavioral patterns. This made Okurontifa (1981) to point out that adult authority and dominance prevailed in the Nigerian traditional society such that children simply became passive members of the society and bowed whole and entire to adult authority and conform to their wishes. Adult behavior and opinions were regarded as model and sacrosanct that they could not be questioned or challenged by children. Some cultures are dogmatic in nature and insist that certain acts must be performed without clear cut reasons. The gifted children will question the status quo of such cultures and are likely not to be challenged by such (Onwuchekwa 1993). He added that some cultures frown at children joining in old people's discussions, some forbid too many questions by children; others would not allow girls watch masquerades while boys are allowed. All this may give emotional and psychological disturbance to the teaching and learning of social studies by such children.

### **c. Religious challenges**

Religion has been a controversial issue in Nigeria education since the advent of early missionary education, and it is expected that the controversy will continue to exist. The teaching of controversial religious issues will remain a problem of social studies teachers, since some of this topics on religion are unavoidable in the teaching and learning of social studies; it poses very serious challenge to social studies teachers who reside in areas where religious issues are highly volatile (Okafor, in IJHER 2009).

Students who are socialized within religious families and communities often have beliefs and behaviors that conflict with those of the school. Religious fundamentalists often challenge the scientific theories taught by schools about the origin of man. Some even attack textbooks and fictional books assigned by teachers that they believe violate or contradict their doctrines.

The school, through the study of social studies should help students mediate between their home, culture and the school culture.

Owing to the controversy with which religious issues are treated, social studies teachers should approach religious related topics with neutrality and objectivity. They should be analytical and impartial in approaching such issues. This will not only encourage the students to emulate such, but the general public as a whole.

### **d. Differences in language**

In the Nigeria traditional setting, teaching and learning was confined to the immediate socio-cultural environment of the culturally homogenous learners. Learning was real to life and had meaning. Today, learners come from varying socio-cultural exposure; most schools are located in the rural areas where the indigenous (vernacular) languages and dialects are spoken. Most social studies students from these rural settings do not understand the language of instruction (English language) our colonial legacy. This disabilities do not only affect students comprehension, understanding and interpretation of social studies instructions in classrooms, but this also tend to make some learners to find it difficult to understand topics or lessons that are not directly related to their own environment despite the concentric approach being emphasized in social studies instruction.

The effect of these socio-cultural practices to social studies teaching and learning is that social studies students are passive recipients of teacher's knowledge. They neither ask questions in the class or their communities nor contribute or exchange ideas with their teachers and fellow students. Social studies cannot thrive in a learning environment where adventurism, exploration, curiosity, participation, inventiveness, independent thinking, investigation or inquiry and creativity are tabooed (Mezieobi and Domike 1996).

### **Multicultural Education**

Multicultural education is an idea, an educational reform movement, and a process whose major goal is to change the structure of education instructions so that male and female student, exceptional students, and students who are members of diverse social class, ethnic and cultural groups will have an equal chance to achieve academically in school (Banks 1990). Another important idea in multicultural education is that some students because of this characteristic have a better chance to learn in schools as they are currently structured than to students who belong to other groups or who have different cultural characteristics. Multicultural education involves changes in the school or educational environment; it is not limited to curricular changes. This must also be viewed as an ongoing process, and not as something that we "do" and thereby solve the problems that are the target of multicultural educational reform.

Multicultural education should be conceptualized exclusively into the school system. Content related to various ethnic and cultural groups is a problem to so many teachers especially among secondary math and

science teachers who cannot easily see how their content is related to cultural and normative issues will easily dismiss multicultural education with the argument that is not relevant to their disciplines. The irrelevant of content argument can become a legitimized form of resistance to multicultural education, when it is conceptualized exclusively as content. Math's and science teachers often states, "Multicultural education is fine for social studies and literature teachers, but it has nothing to do with me". Multicultural education needs to be more broadly defined and understood so that teachers from a range of disciplines can respond to it in appropriate ways and resistance to it can be minimized.

### **The Dimensions of Multicultural Education**

Multicultural education is a broad concept with several important dimensions. These dimensions as explain by (Banks 1995a) are as follows;

#### **A, Content Integration;**

Content integration deals with the extent to which teachers use examples and content from a variety of cultures in their teaching. However, the infusion of ethnic and cultural content into subject area should be logical and not contrived.

#### **B. The Knowledge Construction Process**

This relates with the extent to which teachers help students to understand, investigate and determine how the implicit cultural assumptions, frame of references, perspectives and biases within a discipline influences the ways in which knowledge is constructed within it (Banks 1996).

#### **C. An Equity Pedagogy**

This exists when teachers modify their teaching in ways that will facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse racial, cultural gender, and social class groups. This includes using a variety of teaching styles and approaches that are consistent with the wide range of learning styles with various cultural and ethnic groups.

#### **D. Prejudice Reduction**

This dimension focuses on the characteristics of student's ethnic attitudes and how they can be modified by teaching methods and materials. Children come to school with many negative attitudes towards and misconception about different ethnic groups (Phinney and Rotheram, 1987). Based on this Banks (1995b) explained that lessons, units, and teaching materials that include content about different ethnic groups can help students to develop more positive intergroup attitudes if certain conditions include positive images of the ethnic groups in the materials and the use of multi-ethnic materials in a consistent and sequential way.

#### **E. An Empowering School Culture**

Grouping and labeling practices, sports participation in achievement and the interaction of the staff and students across ethnic and cultural lines must be examined to create a school culture that empowers students from diverse ethnic and cultural groups.

The school as a social system in implementing a multicultural education cannot be over emphasized; we must think of the school as a social system in which all of its variables are closely interrelated and the formalized curriculum and course of study. Any of these factors may be the focus of initial school reform, but changes must take place in each of them to create and sustain an effective multicultural school environment. Hence, when formulating plans for multicultural education, educators should conceptualize the school as a micro culture that has norms, values, statuses and goals like other social system.

### **Summary**

Effective social studies teaching and learning should be a collaborative effort of learners, teachers, resource person/ community resources and government.

Social studies learning experiences and activities should mirror social realities due to the changing nature of society and the socio-cultural institutions therein. Socio-cultural practices that impede the effective teaching and learning of social studies should be discouraged.

There should be intensification of multi-ethnic education in Nigeria, this will make students to understand other ethnic groups outside their own, and also enhance ethnic tolerance, understanding and mutual interrelationships across ethnic boundaries.

Since social studies is an interdisciplinary study Its teachers should however, adopt the integration of methodologies in teaching of social studies, they should employ the variety of methods employed by individual subject disciplines, if the methods are relevant for effective social studies instruction and aid in the attainment of social studies aims and objectives.

All cultural laws should be honestly and scientifically explain to children, policy makers should address community quality if they must be an improvement in student's achievement, since the community of a child has

a great impact on the child's learning. Efforts should not only be limited on individual child but on the community, because the experience of a child outside the school will enhance the teaching and learning inside school.

For the realization of the sustaining philosophy of social studies, all therapies and techniques that could reduce disruptive behavior in and outside social studies classrooms should be employed while discouraging those behaviors that inhibit effective teaching and learning of social studies.

### Conclusion

The paper examined the concepts of social studies, culture and learning. Family/community background, culture, language and religious challenges were examined as those forces within societies and cultures that affect student's thoughts and behaviours in learning social studies. The researcher however recommends that conceptualizing of multicultural education into the school will help to curb these differences in our children's thoughts and thrive effective teaching and learning of social studies in Nigerian schools.

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