

Social Studies Education: An Imperative for the Promotion of Cultural Values for National Integration in Nigeria.

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Abstract

Nigeria is a nation of many ethnic groups with diverse cultures. Such cultures could be seen in the aspects of religion, languages, dressing, types of food consumed, marriages, housing, occupation and so on. The cultural values of the country have become a matter of concern since the development of any society is rooted in what the members of such a society cherished or frown at. For instance, the cultural values which are cherished in the country are basically focused on enhancing human dignity. Such values include discipline, integrity, dignity of labour, social justice, religious tolerance, self-reliance and patriotism. These cultural values are clearly spelt out in the National Philosophy as a measure to ensure rapid integration of the nation. It is believed that any group of people that could not promote their values will surely have a problem of development. In Nigeria, Social Studies Education was conceived as a subject to help heal the wounds of the civil war, ethnicity, ethnocentrism, social and political problems, and to promote culture and national integration, co-operation, good citizenship, among others using the instrument of school (Ezegbe, 1988). This paper therefore examines the concept of culture and cultural values, national integration, concept of Social Studies Education. It also highlighted the place of Social Studies Education in the promotion of cultural values and national integration. The paper concluded by stating that, Nigerian's respect for each other's cultural characteristics will foster national integration in the country. Recommendations were made with a view to making Nigerian cultural values to be properly imparted to the learners through Social Studies Education.

Introduction

Social Studies is a subject designed and evolved to foster in learners a better understanding of the cultural values that guides the interactions of man with his physical and social environment. It is, the most integrated of all subjects at the various levels of education and this has made it to be broad and contain different kinds of elements. This broad nature makes Social Studies the most appropriate subject in the school curriculum to meet the cultural values and moral goals of the society.

The concept of culture and cultural values

The term "culture" has different connotation, according to whether we have in mind the development of an individual, a whole group or class, or a whole society. However, the culture of an individual is certainly dependent on that of the group, which is in turn dependent on the culture of the society to which the group belongs (Sofola, 1973). Culture can also be defined from the point of view of meeting human needs by providing people with the tools and knowledge to survive. It is culture that provides societies with the social institutions and relationships to satisfy human need for organizing ourselves in work and play (Nanda, 1995). The society, through its collective experiences, then arrives at a philosophy which in turn stipulates certain precepts, moral values, religion and modes of behaviours that constitute the values of the people (Sofola, 1973).

Generally, culture refers to the level of sophistication of the individual(s), thus a person can be "cultured" and be "uncultured". A deeper understanding of culture, can be viewed from anthropological and sociological perspectives. Culture in this sense refers to all the things which human beings do but which have no biological basis. In other words, all non-biological actions and behaviours of man are products of his culture. Culture therefore refers to the total way of life of a given people. This includes any piece of pattern of behavior, the attitude, norms, values, objects, skills, belief system and world look which human beings learn and adopt as members of a given group or society. This indicates that culture is all-embracing of human social life, it is learned or acquired. Culture therefore marks the dividing line between man and animals. While the behaviours of animals are determined by instinct and are typical, those of man are influenced by the culture of his society. Furthermore, Adelakun (1990) summarized culture as a total way of life of a people: The way they live from day to day, what they do, behave, cherish, desire and how they go about these things.

The culture of every society is unique. It contains a combination of their norms and value as different from those of other people. Every culture has three aspects to it, material culture - objects physical traits - tools,

non-materials culture subdivided into cognitive (knowledge and beliefs) and normative (moral, laws, custom, rules). Therefore, the African culture spells-out those aspects of life uniquely African, that are product of African hand and African mind. Ogunmodede (1990) explains the essential point of African culture this way:

“African traditional culture held a human-face. There was dignity and respect - for human life which was regarded sacred and to have come from God. Also, cohesion and well-being of the individual was ensured and enhanced through appreciated virtues like spontaneous greetings, friendships and hospitality, cooperation and brotherhood. Justice was accorded its rightful place as a moral imperative and life was peaceful”.

Cultural values

These are the attitudes which a particular society cherishes and abhors for the peaceful co-existence of members of the society which brings about the development of such society. According to Nwuzor (2002), cultural values are those worthwhile and acceptable aspects of non-material culture of a people which help in molding the character of the people. They are the bedrock of the society. The value held in the society shape the behaviours of the people, and when values are good, they are transmitted from generation to generation. The essence is to bring up people who can think positively resulting to self-discovery and development for the benefits of mankind. According to Maduekwe (1979), “sound mind breeds sound people, and sound people build a sound nation”. He goes further to maintain that cultural values held by people help them to do good, say good things and above all love themselves and be able to do the same to others around them, because one can only give what he has to another person.

It is true that cultural value varies from place to place, society from society, but it is still true that there are values which are acceptable by every society of the world. For instance, every society must have family institutions for continuity of the society, and every society forbids murder although there may be differences in the conception of circumstances which actually constitute this. Other examples of cultural universality are cooking, bodily adornment, sports, dancing, food, taboos, incest taboos, laws, medicine, music, funeral ceremonies, gift-giving, games, myths, property rights, personal names, religion, sexual restrictions and tool making (Eddiefloyd 2003). Although, culture is universally practiced, the conception and practicability may differ from place to place, and society to society. The extent to which a particular group of people uphold the values will determine their relationship with other. The situation in which a particular group of people consider their culture superior to others is referred to as ethnocentrism; which is the tendency of a cultural group to regard its own culture as a yardstick or standard for judging the goodness or badness of other culture. Cultural relativism occurs in a situation where one culture or cultural trait cannot be arbitrarily judged by the standard of another culture.

According to Eddiefloyd (2003) cultural relativism is the function, meaning, significance and desirability of cultural trait, element, or practice which depends upon its cultural setting. In other words, the meaning and importance or function of any cultural trait, or practice can only, and should only be understood in relation to the cultural content or milieu which embodies it. A cultural practice should not be appreciated or analyzed, base on one’s motives, habits and general value system. A cultural practice which seems unintelligent, stupid, senseless, or crude practices associated with certain cultural groups becomes intelligible when we take a view of cultural relativism.

The Nature of Social Studies

Social Studies is natural development that has emerged as a result of cultural flow and transfer of ideas. The subject has been an acceptable innovation in America and Britain since and before the beginning of the 20th century. Hence its introduction into Africa follows logical consequence of cultural and political relationship that existed between these three continents. That is why Social Studies may sometimes appear as a carbon-copy of some programmes existing in the West. Social Studies is a corrective study that emphasizes objectives before any content can be of significance.

Furthermore, the nature of Social Studies emphasizes the importance of man. Man is put in a central position and his activities are studied in relation to various environments which could be physical, social or psychological. Man can only exist in his varied environments by understanding, interacting, organizing and running his society in an orderly cultural, economic and political setting. Hence, Social Studies will try to gather relevant knowledge, values and skills centered on the subjects that form parts of these broad spheres of man. We should remember that before Social Studies, the school curricula in these areas did emphasize the study of the world. The world was placed in the centre of everything. Content was formulated to include its crust rotation and movement around the sun, its original divisions and so on. History was looked at in terms of world power, how one part of country governs its self and how it influence man. In the view of these subjects man was only put on the periphery as one of the many parts rather than the manipulator of the physical social psychological forces. Social Studies is the study of people in relation to each other and their world. It is an interdisciplinary subject

that draws upon history, geography, economics, law, political science, and other disciplines. Social Studies focuses on peoples relationship with their social, physical, spiritual, cultural, economic, political, and technological environments. (Western Canadian protocol for collaboration in Basic Education, 2002). According to Ogundare (2010), the nature of man as a social animal living in a particular environment to make his living and to survive, together with the intellect of man and his sense of creativity, all make it necessary for man to always have an organized or orderly society. Every member of the society has to be properly groomed to function well in such society by developing abilities for social responsibilities.

The place of Social Studies in the promotion of cultural values

The place of Social Studies in the promotion of cultural values for national integration in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized. It could be better understood when one views its aims, objectives and methodology vis a vis the national philosophy. Joof and Okam, 1989 and Onifade, 2002 all agreed that the primary and overriding purpose and features of Social Studies programme is citizenship education. They also opined that knowledge and skills are necessary to process information, values, beliefs and social participation which are fundamental in achieving good citizenship. In other words, Social Studies goes beyond acquisition of information to development of attitudes, skills and values. An effective citizen is one who possesses certain desirable attributes including; looking at things with a democratic slant; believing in decency and fairplay; forbearance and acquisition of the customs, traditions and nationalistic ideals of his country.

Social studies as a problem solving subject in any society was introduced to solve the numerous prevailing problems in society. It was first introduced in the United States of America and Britain in 1921 and 1945 respectively. The U.S.A which comprises many people from different continents was looking for a subject that could socially unite the citizens. Britain on the other hand wanted to integrate her citizen after the end of Second World War in 1945. In Nigeria, Social Studies Education was conceived as a subject to help in healing the wound of the civil war, eliminate ethnicity and promote national unity, cooperation, good citizenship among others, using the instrumentality of the school (Ezegebe 1988)

The committee on primary school Social Studies programme cited by Kissock (1981) view Social Studies as those common learning of people's interaction with the social and physical environment, adding that it is not a study, but a way of life of how people influence and are influenced by the physical, social, political, economic, psychological and cultural environment. Torpev (2006) defines Social Studies as a discipline which places human beings as a central point in its studies, and how he influences his environment and how the environment in turn influences him and his ability to withstand the environmental influences. It emphasizes the ability of man to withstand the shock of environmental influence and uses such influences to his advantage.

One may ask, does Social Studies Education have the capacity of promoting cultural values in Nigeria? To clear this doubt, it should be recalled that the goals of Social Studies are rooted on the National Policy on Education (2008). The following educational goals are contained in the document:

The inculcation of national consciousness and national unity.

The inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigeria society.

The training of the mind in the understanding of the world around and the acquisition of the appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competences as equipment for individual to live and contribute to the development of the society (FRN, 2008).

According to Udoh (1974) in Gold (2000) Social Studies objectives which are derived from national goals includes:

- ⇒ To teach the learners to respect the rights and opinions of others.
- ⇒ To be skilled in securing, evaluating and presenting information.
- ⇒ To assure social and civic responsibility.
- ⇒ To learn about vocational activities and opportunities.
- ⇒ To exercise critical judgment
- ⇒ To understand and promote social process.

The overall aim of Social Studies education is to make learners become patriotic, socially responsible and good citizens by understanding the social milieu they are operating from (Azide, 2007). The values which the discipline inculcates in the learners according to Orakwue (2000) in Azide (2007) include an appreciation of the diversity of Nigeria positive thinking, cooperation and honesty. It could therefore be seen that Social Studies has the capacity of inculcating cultural values for the integration of Nigerian nation and Africa as a whole.

Conclusion and Recommendations

A vast and diverse country like Nigeria need to promote her cultural values for national development through education. The subject Social Studies which is basically concerned with the cultural patterns of societies has to

play a major role in carrying out the task. For Nigerian cultural values to be properly imparted to the learners through Social Studies Education:

- The subject should be implemented at the Senior Secondary School level, which is a big gap yet to be filled.
- Only Social Studies specialist should be employed to teach Social Studies, as other subject specialist would not do it well.
- Social Studies curriculum should be restructured for effective promotion of cultural values in the country.

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