

SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: THE ESSENTIAL LINK

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Abstract

The emphasis on the essence of understanding the connection between social studies education and sustainable development in the 21st century, in truism, can bring about national development, national unity, nation-building, national consciousness, patriotism, national integration and the long-needed restructuring and rebranding of Nigeria. In several nations of the world, social studies has provided a solid bases for achieving sustainable development and advancing society especially working out social studies side by side with the millennium development goals (MDGs) and later, the sustainable development goals (SDGs). In a dynamic human society, social studies in a bid to achieve sustainable development has been used for citizenship education, citizenry education, value orientation and re-orientation, gender education, poverty alleviation education, entrepreneurship education, death education, retirement education and in handling all contemporary issues. The sustainable development that Africa countries are looking for especially Nigeria is a big problem. The low quality and poor standard of the Nigerian education make it difficult for people to understand the roles of social studies and the meaning of sustainable development talk more of understanding the connection between social studies and sustainable development. It is imperative to understand social studies education and sustainable development, their link and the roles they play in society. This paper looks at social studies education and sustainable development and the nexus between the two concepts.

Keywords: Social Studies, Social Studies Education, Sustainable Development and Essential Link

Introduction

Social studies education serves as a road map for sustainable development especially for underdeveloped, developing and undeveloped countries in the world including Nigeria. This strategically means that the social studies programme is expected to be developed at all levels of education so as to achieve the desired development, then sustainable development and every facet of development. In consideration of the present situation in Nigeria, one cannot help but to seek for the way forward towards restoring peace, harmony, national unity and consciousness in the society. Social studies education therefore has been developed with those required traits which can be introduced and taught in schools. This will enable the government to channel the mind of growing generation in the right way. Social studies education enhances the achievement of the national educational aims and objectives by equipping in the learner's self-realization, human relationship, civic responsibility, economic competencies and critical thinking through its various content and methods. Osakwe (2013) has stated that social studies is a course of study that studied human beings in various capacity of his interaction with his fellow counterpart. The concept of Social Studies is a discipline which a society uses to instil in students or learners the knowledge, skills, attitudes, aspirations and actions it considers essential in the relationships human beings have with each other, their world and themselves

(Mezieobi, Ossai & Young, 2013). All these are geared towards achieving sustainable development in Nigeria through the instrumentality of social studies education.

In view of the above definitions, social studies is perceived as the study of, man as a social, political, economic, and spiritual entity who aspires to be a responsible and responsive citizen in all areas of life. Nigeria has encountered and is still encountering numerous social challenges which require urgent and adequate attention. Those problems range from influence of colonialism, bad leadership, limited resources, control from foreign countries, terrorism and insecurity, corruption, incessant strikes by Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), domestic violence, sexual immorality, kidnapping, executive rascality, and so on. Achebe (2012) posited that the problem with Nigeria is squarely, that of leadership. It is a general saying that the children are leaders of tomorrow. Therefore, if adequate attention is given to the study of social studies education at lower basic (primary 1-3), middle basic (primary 4-6), upper basic (JSS 1-3) education level schools and senior secondary schools, lots of societal challenges that have to do with juvenile delinquencies will be averted. This will in no small measure promote national unity, national integration, patriotism, national development, nation-building, national consciousness and sustainable development. It is no more a hidden fact that the national unity is highly threatened due to the numerous social vices that have bedevilled the Nigeria's existence. Families are not left out in this struggle for achieving sustainable development through effective teaching and learning of social studies education in schools. Home grown education (that is contextualizing education) helps to evolve a shared language, joy, pains, recreation and awakens the national ego and national consciousness of a people. This cannot be achieved if social studies education fails to be given the right attention by policy formulators, curriculum planners, social studies professional associations, social studies educationists, the government and the schools. Nigeria's resources however are no longer sufficient for all. Youths no longer secure gainful employment at the end of their various academic programmes. Social studies education will provide the youth with critical and creative thinking which will be used for innovations and inventions for the general development of the nation and the eventual sustenance of the national development if achieved. Simply put, social studies education is a map/guide to arrive or achieve sustainable development in Nigeria. Iwena (2017) described map as a representation of the earth's surface. But in education it is seen as a blueprint through which educational aims and objectives will be realized. Social studies education provides a typical blueprint through which a country can achieve development and sustain the already achieved development. The goal of this paper is to examine the connection between social studies education and sustainable development and how social studies education can serve as an instrument for achieving Nigeria's national development and sustainable development.

Social Studies

Social studies are the most inclusive of all school subjects. Social studies as the study of man in his environment, how man influences his environment and how his environment influences him (Mezieobi & Mezieobi, 2016) opens up the fact that social studies is all encompassing and its curriculum should be elaborate. Determining what is included in the social studies curriculum requires facing key questions about social knowledge, skills, and values, including how best to organize them with respect to specific subject matters (example, history, geography, anthropology, and so on.) and

in relation to the unique subjectivities of teachers and their students. Given this, it is not surprising that social studies have been racked by intellectual battles over its purpose, content, and pedagogy since its very inception as a school subject in the early part of the 20th century (Ross, Mathison and Vinson, 2013). For several years and counting, social studies has been regarded as the most potent, veritable tool or vehicle through which human capacity is built, developed and sustained. Concurring with the above assertion Constance (2015) held the opinion that citizenship, social studies skills, interaction, cultural awareness and interpreting information are the key components of social studies. The implication is that social studies' core focus is the teaching of skills, interpreting information, awareness in one's cultural environment and so on. This is supported by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS, 2011) when it said that social studies are an integrated study mainly made up of the social sciences and humanities primarily to promote socio-civic competence. The emphasis here is civic competence. Competence comes into play via training or education just as human capacity building (Clifford and Joseph, 2015). The effective teaching and learning of social studies will bring about national development and sustainable national development through human capacity building and civic competence.

Social Studies Education

Social studies education is basically the strategic approach of inculcating in social studies learners' socio-civic competence, building their capacity as human beings, value orientation and value re-orientation. Stanley and Nelson (2014:266), for example, define social studies education as "the study of all human enterprise over time and space". Social studies education is the core duty of the social studies educationist (a professional social studies teacher). Again, social studies education is an avenue for providing young people with a feeling of hope in the future and confidence in their ability to solve the social and environmental problems of individuals, their community, state or nation (Osakwe, 2019). This underscores, the essence of inculcating patriotic values in the learner through social studies instruction, which will add in equipping the learner further, with the feeling of national consciousness, cooperative attitude and the realization that a formidable progressive Nigeria society would be hinged on citizens who relish in national unity through commitment transparency, accountability and qualitative democratic operational process not inhabited by ethnic sentiment biases. Social studies education is a dynamic course of institution with major focus on how to reshape the thinking patterns, social life, skills, attitude and values of citizens towards accepting and participating in positive social actions geared towards the progressive development of the society. The purpose of social studies and social studies education has caused overwhelming controversies amongst social studies educationists and social studies educators. Even though there has been at least superficial agreement that the purpose of social studies is "to prepare youth so that they possess the knowledge, values, and skills needed for active participation in society" (Marker & Mehlinger, 2012: 832), but the content and pedagogies of social studies education have been greatly affected by various social and political agenda. What does it mean to be a 'good citizen'? Arguments have been made that students can develop 'good citizenship' not only through the long-privileged study of history (Whelan, 2017), but also through the examination of contemporary social problems (Evans & Saxe, 2016), public policy (Oliver & Shaver, 2016), social roles (Superka & Hawke, 2012), social taboos (Hunt & Metcalf, 2018) or by becoming astute critics of one's society (Engle & Ochoa, 2018).

Nigeria's Philosophical Goals and Objectives and Social Studies Education

Nigeria's national development and then sustainable development will be facilitated with the understanding of Nigeria's philosophical goals and objectives with social studies education. The Nigerian education system has undergone many changes in the last few years and no doubt there will be many more changes by the end of the century. Since a national policy on education is the government's way of achieving that part of its national objectives that can be formulated without first identifying the overall philosophy and objectives of the nation. The five main national objectives of Nigeria as stated in the Second National Development plan and endorsed as the important foundation for the National policy in education are the building of:

1. a just and egalitarian society;
2. a free and democratic nation;
3. a united strong and self-reliant nation;
4. a great and dynamic economy,
5. a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens

Furthermore, in order to enhance the realization of the above goals the national education aims and objectives are identified as follows:

1. The inculcation of National consciousness and national unity.
2. The inculcation of right type of values and attitude for the survival of individual and the Nigerian society.
3. The training of the mind in the understanding of the world around and
4. The acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities, competences both mental and physical and equipment for individual to live in and contribute positively to the development of his society and nation building (NPE, 2013).

Social studies education plays vital roles in the actualization of the overall objectives. Furthermore, Ogunjemilua (2021) noted that in establishing the crucial role of social studies education in the actualization of the overall objectives of education, Olubola & Ajitomi (2010) have restated that social studies contents motivate individual citizen toward self-realization, better human relationship of individuals and national consciousness, national unity as well as toward social, cultured, economic, political scientific and technological progress for the achievement of sustainable development.

Sustainable Development in Nigeria

The term sustainable development has several definitions (World Bank, 2015). Sustainable development according to World Bank (2015) is "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". This definition of sustainable development was first admonished in 1987. Nevertheless, these needs may conflict with one another. For instance, clean air to breathe and a car for transportation may form the needs of any individual which may automatically clash or conflict (World Bank, 2015). But Soola (2012) opined that sustainable development is a development that is intra-generationally and inter-generationally situated which does not only generate economic growth but distributes its benefits equitably, that empowers people rather than marginalizing them. In other words, sustainable development promotes equality as man coexists in and with his environment.

It is on note that UN Commission on Environment and Development defined sustainable development as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. Sustainable development has also been defined as the management of our natural resources in a manner that meets the needs of the present generation while protecting and restoring the natural environment for future generations (Ogunjemilua, 2021). Singh (2014) argues that sustainable development means attaining a standard between the present and future needs. Her assertion on sustainable development means equity in development and sectoral actions across space and time. It requires the strategic integration of economic, social and environmental approaches towards development. In Nigeria, sustainability is a concept needed for capital advancement, national development and capacity building. Three interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars of sustainable development are recognized world-wide in the transition towards a sustainable society. There is economic sustainability, environmental sustainability, and social sustainability, within this concept, the environment dimension lays a significant role being the natural system which serves as the surrounding medium in which the social and economic systems are embedded. The Nigerian environment is a condition for sustainable development. Society is the end for which development is undertaken and economy is the means to achieving that end. The maintenance of environmental structure is therefore crucial for long term economic development. Because life on earth is conditioned upon a healthy environment, the environmental pillar, must of necessity be viewed as of utmost importance to the economic and social pillars of sustainability.

Problem of Sustainable Development with Social Studies Education

There are lots of problems that have prevented Nigeria from developing talk more of sustaining its already achieved development. Some of these problems are but not limited to corruption, poverty, kidnapping, school drop-out syndrome, domestic violence, looting and money laundering, terrorism, militancy, insecurity, lack of standard and quality education, youth unemployment, inflation and so on. One can only talk about a nation’s sustainable development only if and when the nation is already developed. In the global village, Nigeria is still rated as an underdeveloped nation which makes it difficult for researchers to discussed sustainable development in Nigeria elaborately. Social studies has a role to play in working on how to improve upon our democratic, cultural values and meaningful productivity.

The problems in society regarding Nigeria’s development are even dynamic and they are well addressed with the teaching and learning of social studies education in the schools. Socio-economic and political activities are well organized with well-educated citizens than less educated citizens. Educated citizens can put in their best to produce good society. There is need for the improvement in the teaching and learning of social studies education for sustainable development in Nigeria. In truism, if the teaching and learning of social studies are improved upon, the Nigeria environment will feel the positive impact in the way of reduction in corrupt practices, improved health system, standard and quality education, steady power supply, reduction in unemployment rate, and resuscitation of pipe borne water, good road network and so on.

Skills' Acquisition in Social Studies for Sustainable Development

In social studies, skills' acquisition entails acquiring a handiwork irrespective of position, gender, educational qualification, social class and so on. Nigerians could be more self-reliant and self-employed if they are well empowered in skill that are related to their environment.

The Nigerian people engage in small scale enterprises, which is one of the ways of reducing the incidence of poverty and unemployment. The major problem is the unavailability off an enabling environment and government's support. To achieve sustainable development, social studies education must be given its rightful place. It has been the key towards moving human beings from one era to another. Social studies education has been the key to drive the human activities in society. It is agreed that education is universally believed to be a key to or the bedrock of nation development.

For example, uneducated women do not enjoy political and economic power. A society that accommodates illiterate women stands the risk of having population incapable of participating effectively in the political, economic, social and cultural life of any community or effective women, mothers and wives.

Skills' acquisition in social studies will facilitate development. This is because if every adult Nigerian acquires one skill or the other and gets busy, crime will reduce, unemployment will reduce. Nigerians will begin to contribute meaningfully to the development of Nigeria without totally and completely depending on the Nigerian government for everything.

Benefits of Social Studies Education to Sustainable National Development

Sustainable national development can be measured in economic terms as the Gross National Product (GNP) at any particular time or by order indicators as roads, communication networks, architectural designs and technological, political sophistication, national stability, improved sanitation and health care, good food, housing and clothing, eradication of poverty and equitable distribution of available resources (Fielder, 2017). Appropriate mental disposition through positive enlightenment obtained from education and by extension, social studies education can lead to national development. Social studies education is a denominator of sustainable national development. Therefore, genuine development involves any attempt to improve the existential conditions of human beings. Educated individuals have a greater understanding of their rights and responsibilities (Enaibe, 2013).

Social studies empowerment cuts across various groups in the society. It empowers the so-called marginalized groups in the society. For example, it is believed that women are marginalized in Nigeria. Therefore, social studies enable the women to identify their potentials and talents beyond childbearing and love for husbands. It helps them to overcome social prejudice; take control over their lives, assumes a high social status, combat undue violence and subjection, sex stereotyping, challenge the discriminatory debating and biased gender roles and attitudes against them and create in them political awareness, make them develop life for their economic development, national unity and reconstruction, instil in them cultural values and the realization of the importance of child care, reduce maternal and child mortality and HIV/AIDS transmission.

Social Studies Education, Sustainable Development and Empowerment

Social studies education and sustainable development empowers the people politically, economically, socially, technologically and so on. They place every group irrespective of deficiencies on the same pedestal. For example, social studies education and sustainable development enhance women education through empowerment. The federal government of Nigeria has made several efforts

to encourage the education of women through skills' acquisitions and entrepreneurship in order to give them the opportunity to contribute to nation building. One of these efforts made include the establishment of female colleges. This act was necessitated by the quest to bridge the gap between boys and girls in the country (Fabinu, 2013). Apart from the empowerment of women, Nigerian men and youths are also empowered to participate in activities that have been pencilled to be for the elderly like politics. Social studies education and sustainable development promotes provision of enabling environment for the most marginalized groups to be active in national affairs at all times.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the achievement of sustainable development in Nigeria is totally reliant on the effective teaching and learning of social studies education in Nigerian schools. Sustainable development is the path way to the Nigeria's future and this future can only be sustained through social studies education. This is the only framework that can bring together the full range of human aspirations and national needs. Nigeria needs to adopt sustainable development strategies if she is not to be left behind in the era of sustainable revolution through the teaching and learning of social studies education. Sustainable development enables, by the integration of economic growth social justice and environmental stewardship must be made the global guiding principle and operational standards. The paper has attempted to discuss social studies education's contributions to national development. Based on the foregoing that sustainable development does not occur through good policies on paper alone but also requires the prosper implementation of well-articulated educational goals. This write-up has given insight into how people think about and integrate education into their everyday and long term concerns and into their ideas and attitudes towards national development through the instrumentality of social studies education. The relationship between social studies education and sustainable development cannot be underemphasized. Social studies education breeds sustainable development and equips a nation's citizens with the right sense and capacity to achieve sustainable development, nation-building, human capacity building and national development.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are apt for this paper:

1. The Nigerian government, schools and all education stakeholders should promote the teaching and learning of social studies education at all levels of education including higher education.
2. An aspect of social studies education that has to do with capacity building should be introduced in tertiary institutions as a general course.
3. Resources and materials for the effective teaching and learning of social studies education should be adequately provided.
4. Social studies laboratory should be well equipped for effective demonstration of social studies.
5. Nigerians should be encouraged to acquire skills. This will reduced the high rate of unemployment.
6. Nigerian youths should be adequately engaged to reduce crime in our society.
7. The most vulnerable and marginalized groups should be given opportunities to participate in national affairs like women, the poor, youths, children and so on.

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