

REPOSITIONING SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM FOR NATIONAL TRANSFORMATION IN NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

The paper advocates the need to reposition social studies education curriculum to address the nation's quest for transformation. It looks at existing Nigerian curriculum as defective and lacking natural potency to form the bedrock of national transformation; hence it advocates for a paradigm shift in the content and pedagogy of social studies education for national transformation. The paper observes that moral and character education, policy education and peace education should be the focus of content repositioning while there should be pedagogical shift to conscientization, scientific pedagogy and simulation method. The paper concludes that national transformation agenda could not be accomplished without proper inclusion of these themes and methods in social studies education curriculum. Some useful recommendations are offered at the end.

Introduction

National transformation is one of the most used “catch phrases” by politicians during electioneering to win the minds, of the electorates. It has been the focus of all administrations but because we want to be charitable, we are not accusing any of these leaders, both past and present, that little or nothing has been achieved to enhance the nation’s quest for transformation. Transformation actually means a complete change from one situation to another, a drastic departure from the old to a new one (Nairu 2011). In the vision of the institute for National Transformation, National transformation is to develop “no excuse” leaders of integrity and exceptional organizational skills from both the private and public sectors throughout the world that will proffer preferred democratic performance to dictatorship, control and abuse and leave legendary positive impact in the nation instead of failure and excuses.

National transformation does not come accidentally, it requires deliberate efforts. To change a failed nation like Nigeria to a successful one like the advanced countries of the world calls for performance in different sectors of national life that will facilitate the actualization of such dreams.

Paradoxically, the apparent euphoria that characterizes the expectation of Nigerians at the beginning of every administration flagged due to continued developmental ill health that is evident in some cardinal sectors that make a nation viable and great. In the heat of this uncertainty, social studies educators need to reaffirm the vision of social studies education.

Education, according Opoh (2011), is an activity which goes on in the society; whose aims and objectives depend on the nature, need and aspiration of the society in which it takes place. It is widely perceived and acknowledged as an instrument per excellence for the transformation of any human society. As put by Obanya (2002) throughout history, societies, both developed and underdeveloped, complex and non-complex, have used education as a relevant instrument for effecting desirable social, economic, political and technological transformation. It is from this anticipation of designing a curriculum that will address socio-economic, political and technological issues that led to the introduction of social studies curriculum in Nigerian schools.

The envisaged mission of the true bearers of social studies therefore, was to prepare the individual for the roles he is to play, providing him with the necessary experience of habits, belief and values, the appropriate patterns of emotional response and modes of perception as well as the requisite skills and knowledge for peaceful coexistence (Opoh 2011). It can also be deduced from the subject matter of social studies education that one of its essence was to communicate the good moral conduct of the society from one generation to the other.

Five decades after its full scale implementation, this laudable essence of social studies is still a dream to come. Okam (cited in Mezeobi 2008) affirmed the failure of social studies when he stated that “...social studies education in Nigerian schools and colleges... has failed in its educational mission in Nigeria or rather is failing in this enterprise” (p.145). By implication, this means that the goal of social studies education curriculum is yet to be achieved. This has been signaled by our society characterize by moral decadence, religious intolerance, man-made woes, corruption, terrorism, rigging of elections, examination malpractice, inflation of contracts etc. Nwaubani (2010), also stated that many conceptual issues which largely bother on ethnicity, mutual suspicion and antagonism, racial prejudices, ethnocentrism and stereotypism have negatively

affected peaceful interaction and understanding among the different peoples and groups in Nigeria. Subsequently, elements of national transformation like unity in diversity, credible election, religious tolerance and equality have remained strangers to our national transformation.

What then is responsible for this delay in the national transformation agenda? In what seems to be a response, Fan (2003) has suggested that social development only occurs when there are changes in the people's living style as a result of a higher level of education, availability of improved health services and other social amenities like transportation and communication. Social development inevitably leads to national transformation provided the education given to citizenry is functional and pragmatic in its contents and methodology. Emphasis of education should be placed on inculcation of national norms and values rather than religious or ethnic sentiments. With this, social studies education curriculum can be rightly seen as a discipline in Nigerian school system with the greatest mandate toward national transformation. Nwaubani (2010) therefore suggested that it is expedient to find out if the social studies curriculum could be refocused to actually promote peace education concepts for instructional purposes in Nigerian schools for national transformation. It is from this suggestion that this paper is designed to advocate the repositioning of social studies education curriculum for national transformation. The paper focuses on:

- Repositioning social studies Education content for National Transformation, and
- Repositioning social studies Education pedagogy for National transformation.

Repositioning Social Studies Education Content for National Transformation.

Without doubt, the spiral themes of social studies education curriculum such as resource management and development, social change, inter-group relations etc as reflected in students' handbook were farfetched. Reacting to this, Nwaubani (2010) revealed that with these inherent in the curriculum, social studies is not only problem-centered or oriented but also educative. However, this has not given social studies the needed dressing as a paradigm for national transformation. Generally, the Nigerian education system has been largely defective and unsound. Given this scenario, it would naturally be unable to form the bedrock for national transformation if not repositioned. There are obvious signals to demand for this change. Nwachukwu (2007) on her part acknowledged this change when she posits that our 21st century educational arena calls for specific shift in curricular contents, objectives and methodology.

Moral and Character Education for National Transformation

From the beginning of the 21st Century, the time devoted to moral and character education in most Nigerian schools has decreased due to the popular focus on academic standards, accountability and standardized testing, without minding the place of the affective domain in the national transformation agenda. Emphasis is placed on the cognitive domain while the inculcation of moral values is left porous.

Enu (2007) informed that moral values are fundamental for holding society together and formulating decisions either at the individual or at national level. The essence of moral education in social studies curriculum can be located in how national values and philosophy are inculcated and

upheld for national life. To these authors, the crux of national transformation is the training of citizenry on moral and good character formation.

The missionaries made their lasting impact on education because of their strict moral observances and codes which they inculcated in the students (Fan, 2003). Today, with the rising criminality in the society and the equally detestable bravado of ethnic chauvinism nationwide, the place of a curriculum to reawaken the moral conscience of Nigerians is too unique to be filled at all levels of education. Social studies educators should therefore be committed to the training of youths to make good use of their hand, head and heart. Train people to be morally upright, to respect others' rights and values, to embrace unity in diversity and national integration for nation building. This is the type of social studies curriculum we envisage, the type of education that is able to transform this nation. According to Oyekan (2000), an individual with this type of knowledge knows the important values of education as scarce ingredient of nation building. The relevance of a man with such moral value in national transformation is manifested in his/her creative imaginations for precautionary diplomacy, maintenance culture and technological evolution.

Barring a major shift in priorities, the future of moral and character education appears to hinge on the evaluation of its potential for reducing drug abuse, ethnic prejudice, corruption, gross disrespect and improving intercultural understanding and national integration. According to Lickona cited in Esu (2009), leaders in education are not likely to change course unless research results show that academic goals are achievable using a curriculum that addresses all aspect of development, thereby integrating academic and character goals, objectives and methods. The repositioned social studies education curriculum therefore becomes the most indispensable discipline to address this because of its integrated and eclectic nature.

Policy Education and National Transformation

Policy formulation and implementation in Nigeria are often plagued by a number of factors. Very often, laudable policies formulated by government go into thin air at the implementation stage. This in most cases like the fuel subsidy removal, is as a result of lack of publicity and enlightenment of the populace at the embryonic stage of the essence and perhaps the danger of the failure to implement such policies. The outcome of a forceful implementation of such unpopular policies is social unrest which is always a constraint to national transformation. For instance, Sahara (2012) reports that the fuel subsidy removal conflict has rubbished the objectives of all the ongoing developmental programmes especially the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which seek to reduce the number of people living in poverty by 2015.

Most experts contend that even if the fuel subsidy removal is a fiscal necessity as presented by the Government, its timing was wrong. Also, there was public outcry from every sector that the removal of fuel subsidy was sudden, deceptive and lacking transparency, because it was not allowed for a more robust dialogue and public discussion.

It is the dream of this paper to inform that such a laudable government policy should be taken to the classroom at all levels for publicity. With due consideration, social studies education curriculum is the discipline with the mandate to address contemporary issues of this magnitude. We are optimistic that if our present day youths are given the inspiration and enlightenment of current

affairs and policies of the government, they will complete Nigeria's peregrination to national transformation because they were given the sense of belonging.

Education for Peace and National Transformation

Peace can be said to be the greatest factor facilitating sustained national transformation. According to Denga (2008), this is because war times always witness little or no economic investment. The absence of peace on itself is a threat to national transformation drives.

Designing a curriculum that will give the populace ample opportunity to be given constant civic/peace education on their rights as well as civic responsibilities is a call in the right direction. In this connection, curriculum to enlighten the people on the danger of violence will open up the minds of the people to enable them embrace dialogue for conflict resolution which is instrumental for socio-economic development.

Peace education should therefore be incorporated as a theme or element of social studies education at all levels. It is also important to note here that anything can be taught to any child at any level depending on the pedagogical competence of the instructor. In other words, such peace education could be carried out through radio jingles, television, drama production to portray the negative effect of violence. Millennium education such as the repositioned social studies education has an urgent responsibility to offer peace and confidence building education to the nation as a social responsibility to the nation and its people.

Repositioning Social Studies Education Pedagogy

Pedagogy as the art and science of teaching is very essential in instructional processes. Edozie and Ezeoba (2010) define pedagogy as the whole context of instruction, learning and actual operation invaded therein, which must be child-centered. For Opoh (2011), the concept of pedagogy as applied in education involves the theory or principles of education and the methods of teaching based on such theory which can make or mar students' academic achievement. The teacher's pedagogical competence dictates the mode and outcome of instructional process in the classroom.

Putting Nigerian education in a more responsive shape in order to plant the nation and its continent Africa on the map will need a whole lot of new initiatives for new realities in pedagogical paradigm creation (Nwachukwu 2007). These realities in pedagogical paradigm creation encompass the interwoven processes of curriculum implementation in the classroom. Mezeobi (1993) conceptualized the term implementation simply as a means of putting a plan, scheme, decision, proposal, installation, an agreement, policy or idea into effect. It is the bedrock of any plan's success or failure of any endeavour. The major factors for effective implementation are the methodological competence of the teacher.

Therefore, for the implementation of the repositioned social studies education curriculum for national transformation, there must be methodological shift from the traditional subject-centered methods of teaching (lecture, project, discussion methods) to child-centered and problem-solving methods. The following problem solving methods are advocated as the most appropriate methods to be adopted by teachers in teaching social studies.

i. Conscientization

Conscientization is one of the most essential methodological approaches to the effective implementation of moral and character education. Conscientization can be employed both as a method of teaching and as a weapon for changing the *status quo*. The method of conscientization involves the approach of moving the society from the closed to the open society. Therefore, the teaching of social studies themes, like character and moral education includes, transformation processes, an instrument for correcting social injustice and acceptable knowledge, attitude and skills.

Conscientization as a method of teaching moral and good character formation includes the teacher showing an exemplary life. According to Enu (2007), scandalous acts by teachers would evidently dampen the teacher's zeal in the campaign against fragrant standards of ethical values. So in this method, the teacher is a typical role model of the students. The method also encompasses re-orientation, re-definition, re-education and sensitization of students against injustice and other forms of immoral acts. It is a critical pedagogy of education for critical consciousness.

The critical pedagogy can be used by both parents and the teacher; it can start with the frustration of the inborn drives of children. Parents or teachers in the adoption of this method can frustrate such instinctual behavior through negative reinforcement and induce children to behave in the socially accepted manner.

Besides, parents and teachers adoption of this method the role of the accredited organ of Nigerian Government- the National Orientation Agency (NOA) - should be embraced on kiddy programmes in radio and television stations. It is therefore important to state that the National rebirth programme launched in the year 2000 is a welcome innovation in this nation. Hence, stakeholders in the education industry should think of bringing it to the classroom situation as a method.

ii. Shift to Scientific Pedagogy

The traditional pedagogical paradigm in all levels of our teaching in Nigerian education systems needs drastic shifts from what Denga (2008) termed **plastic learning** to **metallic learning**. Nwachukwu (2007) puts it thus: we need to move away from the present dwarfing and enslaving style of rote learning to a more liberating kind of education. It is high time we abandoned the pedagogy of the oppressed, banking education, plastic learning to a more constructive and scientific pedagogy for national transformation. In this approach, children should be given opportunity to interact with their environment and bring results or solution to problems.

The "telling method", the ceaseless note copying habit and the rote learning habit in school produce a generation of school graduates who, according to Piaget, even after first degree still operate at the concrete operational stage of learning development instead of the synthesis level (Nwachukwu 2007). The products of such defective pedagogy remain consumers of information without critical consciousness and ability for originating ideas for national transformation. The shift to this scientific pedagogy would breed a generation of intellectuals who evolve ideas and principle for national transformation.

iii. Simulation Method

Also viable in the teaching of the repositioned social studies education is the simulation method. Simulation as a method of teaching is one of the most interesting and rewarding teaching techniques that have been developed in recent times. Like conscientization, simulation is a dynamic and likely way of presenting very thought-provoking ideas, problems, issues and realities in our past and present social life.

The word “simulation” comes from the Latin root “Similis” (Fan, 2003) meaning like, to act like, to resemble. Thus, simulation method can be used to present an ideal life situation (fairness, tolerance, patriotism, respect for others, etc.) in such a way that students will learn and understand more about them.

In the adoption of this method, the teacher must be careful to point out the moral lessons the simulated game seeks to accomplish before the students. The games should be such that good characters are always rewarded positively whereas bad character exhibited in the game comes with negative consequences. This new pedagogy is a vital method for moral and good character formation because such social behaviors like tolerance, patience, love, etc, are easily demonstrated, observed and learnt through instructional games. Hence, teachers of the repositioned social studies education should encourage some drama, modeling and game that have specific instructional values for national consciousness.

Suggestions

The following suggestions are made in line with issues raised in the paper.

- (1) The repositioned social studies education curriculum should be one that impacts knowledge that provides valuable information necessary for life and being at all level and its function is to facilitate among the learners the inculcation of desirable social habit, health, attitudes and sound moral values.
- (2) Curriculum experts should as a matter of urgency redesign social studies curriculum to incorporate themes like moral and character training, peace education and policy education while problem solving methods advocated in this paper should be used.
- (3) Government, through the ministry of education should organize conferences or seminars to train practicing teachers on the application of these new pedagogical approaches advocated.

Conclusion

Good education is essential for the proper functionality, continuity and transformation of the individual and the nation at large. It is believed that any curriculum that can meet this transformatory need of any nation must be viable. The advantageous position of an integrated and eclectic discipline like Social Studies Education cannot be overemphasized. Yet we are living witnesses of our defective educational system hence, there is need to reposition these curriculum contents and pedagogy to reflect the contemporary needs of the society.

We have therefore, made a case why we need the paradigm shift in Social Studies Education curriculum to incorporate moral and character formation, policy education, peace education and the methods to be adopted by instructors. These would surely put youths as good agents for national transformation if effectively implemented. We expect this refined, committed, repositioned and responsive curriculum would produce youths who have the confidence and authority to engage in reflective thinking and logical thoughts in making rational decisions towards the resolution of different human conflicts and societal problems.

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