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# Evaluating Social Studies Curriculum for Instructional Efficiency in Nigerian Schools and Colleges

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## Introduction

The notion that learning in a particular subject depends to a large extent on the nature of its structural design is both instructive and fundamental to curriculum and instruction (Bruner, 1963) Consequently, the way and manner the content of a subject is organized for instructional purposes is similarly determined by the structure of the discipline which the subject represents (Wheeler, 1967).

The centrality of this notion to integrated social studies curriculum especially at the primary and lower levels of the secondary schools system is predicated on Jerome Bruner's (1963) popular assertion that "any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development", if adequately and relevantly structured. This suggests that every discipline has a structure which is made up of some fundamental concepts and generalization peculiar to it.

The approach to learning in Nigeria in recent times especially at the primary and junior secondary school levels has shifted steadily and considerably from the unidisciplinary approach to integrated experiences, (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1981, 1998). The desire for this new trend is necessitated by the changing nature and complexity of the problems and issues which now confront the individual learner in his environment. It is also based on the perceived shortcomings of the single – subject disciplines in dealing effectively with the problems of relationship and interaction in man's dynamic environment (Udoh, 1993, Mansaray, 1996). Thus, there is now hardly any decision that can be taken on any aspect of human endeavour based solely on limited knowledge and information from one discipline alone.

Attempts at initiating new paths and focus on interrelationship in learning in Nigeria's educational system started in earnest with the 1969 National Curriculum Conference. The Conference, among other things recommended the integrated social studies as one of the Innovative Curricular Offerings at the primary and lower forms of secondary school education in Nigeria (Okobia, 1984). Fundamentally, integrated social studies is concerned with the problems and realities of man's relationship with his environment (NERDC, 1981). To achieve this aim, social studies is structured to reflect and accommodate the multi-dimensional character, needs and problems of man and his dynamic environment.

Therefore to understand the unique nature and dynamics of the social studies curriculum in dealing with social problems and issues, it is necessary to examine its structural framework with a view to underscoring its instructional relevance in the Nigerian school system. This chapter is therefore tailored towards assessing the extent to which the goals and structural framework of the primary and junior secondary school studies meet the instructional needs of Nigerian pupils.

The basic questions which are considered very fundamental to the above issues and addressed in this paper include the following:-

1. Are the goals or aims of primary and junior secondary school social studies curricular relevant to societal needs, problems and aspirations as reflected in the aims of education in Nigeria and stated in the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1981, 1998)?
2. Does the structural framework of the social studies curriculum truly reflect the integration of content (Concepts, generalizations, values, attitudes and skills) from relevant disciplines?
3. Are the contents, learning activities/experiences and recommended instructional strategies adequate and implementable within the context of the educational environment of the Primary and junior secondary school pupils in Nigeria?

Answers to the above questions underscore the need for an evaluation of the intellectual values, capacity and potentials of the social studies curriculum especially in assisting Nigerian pupils to adjust and to function in their dynamic environment.

## The Concept of Educational Evaluation

The term evaluation in educational practice connotes different things to many people. Cooley and Lohness (1976) define evaluation as a process by which relevant data are collected and transformed into information for decision making. Thus, to them, evaluation is successful if the information generated form part of the decision-making process in education.

Similarly, Tyler (1942) perceives evaluation as the process of finding out the extent to which the goals of a programme have been or are being achieved. To Tyler, determining the goals and objectives of a programme is an important aspect of evaluating an educational programme. This position reflects very much the goal attainment models of programme evaluation.

Pophan (1975) defines formal evaluation as the assessment of the worth of educational phenomenon. Yet to Yoloje (1981) evaluation in the sense of ordinary usage means assigning of some values to an entity in relation to some criteria.

Obemeata (1984) however observes that these definitions are different perspectives to the same basic issues in evaluation. Thus, he defines educational evaluation as the process of making a judgement on the extent to which an educational programme is achieving its objectives.

It therefore follows that educational evaluation is the process of determining whether an educational system or a unit of it is performing the job which it is intended or expected to perform. It can also imply the prospects of an educational programme (given its structural framework) of achieving the objectives for which it was designed and developed.

However, whether evaluation is primarily concerned with programme or the progressive performance of students, instructional effectiveness, institutional input and output etc, the inspirational motives remain essentially the same – that is, the ability to arrive at justifiable and defensible positions or make valid judgements based on data or information.

Thus, of significance to evaluation but by no means strictly synonymous with it, are the two related concepts, measurement and assessment. By and large, these are comparable indices based on which quality judgements or decisions on educational issues are taken. Basically,

the main purpose of evaluation is to assist decision-makers at various stages of an educational programme – formative (process) or summative (at the end) to take appropriate actions that would ensure instructional efficiency.

Against this backdrop, it is therefore necessary to evaluate the instructional capacity of the primary and junior secondary school social studies curricular in assisting Nigerian pupils gain knowledge and develop appropriate values, attitudes and skills which they require to become functional citizens in their environment (Obemeata, 1983; Joff 1984).

An Institutional framework for such an evaluation would naturally demand knowledge of:

- Objectives of social studies curriculum
- Organizational and structural patterns of social studies curriculum
- Instructional relevance of the curriculum content and materials as well as the strategies for effective implementation in the classroom.

## **The Structure and Patterns of Organization of Social Studies Curriculum**

There are several possible ways of organizing social studies contents. These include the separate subject approach, the multi-disciplinary approach, the thematic, spiral and integrated approaches. Each of these represent as it were distinct opinions on the patterns of the structure of social studies (Aina, Adeyoyin, Obilo & Ahmadu, 1982).

Proponents of the separate subject approach use the term social studies to generically identify the subject but reflect the identity of each of the separate disciplines making up the content of the subject in actual classroom teaching. To them (and they are many of such) social studies content is ordinarily amorphous with bits and pieces drawn mainly from allied school subjects like History, Government, Economics, etc (Omolewa, 1987; Cross 1988).

The Multi-disciplinary approach is a conscious effort to move away from the shortcomings of the subject centred approach. Here, content (concepts) drawn from the separate subjects are brought

The Thematic approach is not only popular but very central to the Nigerian Social Studies Programme (Adeyemi 1986, 1989; Makinde 1979). The thematic and integrated approach in curriculum organization is geared towards assisting learners to have a coherent view of the environment and its problem in order to grapple with them adequately. The benefit in the approach makes it to be adopted in the Sciences inherent as can be found in the Integrated Science Project (Emeke and Odetoyinbo 2004).

Similarly, this approach is centred on societal themes which become reference points in the organization of social studies content. Thus, in the thematic approach, concepts, generalization and ideas which are based on inherent societal problems and issues and derived from other subjects or disciplines are harmonized and integrated to form an entirely new content called integrated social studies (Ogunsanya, 1984).

However, themes to be taught in social studies classrooms, have to be broken down into manageable units or interrelated components of instruction that are consistent with the theme (Mansaray, 1991). According to him, from the theme "interdependence" units like "living together in the family" and "the community" "living together as citizens of Nigeria" and "economic interdependence among nations" e.g. Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) can be developed. Similarly, specific classroom lessons can also be generated from the units. For example, from the unit "living together in the family and the community" lessons on "living in the family, school life, life in the village or town, community" can be prepared.

Social studies content can also be structured around concepts and generalizations. There has indeed been persistent scholarly interest on the kind of curriculum structure that would help learners to achieve desirable learning outcomes through effective instruction (Tyler 1949; Taba, 1962; Wheeler 1967; Tanner & Tanner 1978). Bruner (1963) observes that every discipline has a structure which is made up of the fundamental concepts, generalizations and principles that constitute the content of a discipline. He asserts that while it is not possible to teach all the facts, it is possible to teach all the fundamental concepts or structure of a subject.

Tyler (1949) argues that the key organizing elements or strands in the process of curriculum integration are concepts and generalizations. In social studies, concepts and generalizations are common aspects of subject

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The Multi-disciplinary approach is a conscious effort to move away from the shortcomings of the subject centred approach. Here, content (facts, information, concepts) drawn from the separate subjects are brought together correlationally but without losing their identities (Balogun, 1986).

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matter or content. Concepts represent the commonality among objects, events or ideas. It is the classification of ideas, objects and events into groups based on similar or common attitudes. A proper grasp of concepts enhances remembering, recall, understanding and transfer of facts and knowledge (Udoh, 1993). Generalizations show relationship between concepts and other things. Social studies content is replete with concepts like co-operation, scarcity, change, patriotism, tolerance, respect for individuals and property etc. (Makinde 1979).

The "Spiral" (Concentric) or widening horizon approach to the organization of content is also popular among social studies educators. The learner and his immediate environment form the central concern in this approach. Basically, theme, facts, concepts and generalizations skills, attitudes and value that are recent to the learners immediate environmental form the content. It is spiral or concentric because at each succeeding stage those organizing element (concepts, facts, themes etc) are broadened and deepened to include other environments and other people along the same central themes or issues (Ogunsanya, 1984).

Integration of content is therefore part of the general organizational approach or structure in curriculum design, development and implementation (Balogun, 1986). It is basically a process of weaving or blending together facts, concepts, skills, attitudes and values derived from different subject areas which are seen as being important to the study of man's interaction with his environment.

In the process of curriculum integration, issues like Scope, Balance, Continuity and Sequence, have always been prominent (Taba, 1962, Dada, 1999). Scope is basically concerned with coverage. That is, how much that has to be done to achieve some desired learning outcomes. By implication, scope also refers to what content and learning experiences are required to achieve desired outcomes.

Continuity refers to the fact that learning is a continuous process and the learner a functioning whole. Thus, each experience in curriculum organization cannot be considered in isolation because of mutual relatedness. Invariably when experiences are perceived as unrelated, learners tend to lose sense of order or purpose. In this respect, learning in social studies should be developmental. Continuity is therefore required to enhance, reinforce and relate previous experiences to new ones.

Balance refers to the relative representation of different elements in a curriculum to avoid lopsidedness. It deals with balance among curriculum elements.

Sequencing of curriculum deals with how content can be arranged so that what is learnt at a stage is built upon at the next higher stage. It is therefore simply the order on which an activity is carried out. In social studies, practical sequencing resides with the teacher in the classroom. This is so because, sequencing is effective if contents are effectively taught to reflect breadth and depth of learning.

### **Evaluating Primary and Junior Secondary School Social Studies Curricular**

In assessing social studies curriculum, there is the need to be properly guided and focused on important elements like goals, content, learning experiences/activities and instructional efficiency. These are taken up in detail below.

#### **Goals of Social Studies**

The goals of the current primary and junior secondary school social studies reflect the needs, problems and aspirations of the Nigerian society as summarized in the goals of education in Nigeria and stated in the National policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1981:8; 1998:8, 1998). The national education goals are

- 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 Nigerian society;
- the training of the mind in the understanding of the world around; and
- the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of his society.

The primary and secondary school social studies seek to foster in the young learner a deep understanding of his environment through necessary

knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. For instance, the Nigerian primary social studies is designed to help the young Nigerian learner to:

- (a) develop the ability to adapt to his changing environment;
- (b) inculcate national consciousness and national unity;
- (c) become a good citizen capable of and willing to contribute to the development of the society and
- (d) inculcate the right sense of values and attitudes (Federal Ministry of Education, National Curriculum for Primary Social Studies, 1983:5)

These goals no doubt are more or less summaries of the national aims of education which emphasized among other things, issues like self-determination, self-sufficiency, patriotism, effective and participatory citizenship, better human relationship, national consciousness and unity etc. The questions are, can the above goals be achieved through the effective teaching of social studies? Are there indeed some fundamental societal needs, problems and aspirations which informed the goals and possibly content of the primary and Junior secondary school social studies in Nigeria?

Certainly, the answer is in the affirmative given the fact that idea of social studies was borne out of social demands, and needs at some material point in time in Nigeria (Adeyemi, 1986). For instance, the various problems affecting the Nigerian Society especially after independence namely corruption, unemployment, ethnicity, indiscipline, religious parochialism, hunger, dishonesty in the distribution of national wealth by leaders, crime etc necessitated the introduction of social studies (Udoh, 1993). The need became even more pronounced after the Nigerian civil war when it was envisaged by curriculum planners that through the teaching of social studies in Nigerian schools, political stability, national consciousness and unity could be promoted in Nigeria.

### **Content and Learning Experiences/ Activities**

The main questions here which would help one's assessment are:

- (1) Does the content of social studies have the capacity or prospect of engaging pupils in what we really want them to learn?

- (2) To what extent has the content met the criteria of scope, balance, continuity and sequence which are important elements in curriculum integration?

These questions touch on issues that are fundamental and germane to the nature and structure of social studies curriculum. However, the contending issue here is not merely the theoretical basis of the structure but whether the curriculum content as it were, is deep, rich and extensive enough to make learning interesting, active, interactive and very engaging for Nigerian pupils?

The organization of the Junior Secondary school curriculum for instance, according to Udoh (1982) was guided by six major criteria namely:

- the sequence of topics and resulting learning experiences
- the relevance of objectives and content
- the teachability of the content
- the learnability and interest value of the content
- the practicability of the objectives and contents to living.
- the scope of the learning activities.

First, are the topics and related learning experiences properly sequenced? Indeed, the primary social studies curriculum is based on the horizontal spiral approach which reinforces the concept of proper sequencing in the breadth and depth of content organization. The idea here is that certain basic knowledge, skills, values and attitudes are properly sequenced thereby making learning progressive from a much more familiar to remote context. Again, what pupils learn in primary 1 are reviewed and related to a wider context at a higher level in primary school 2.

Second, the content is not simply replete with catalogue of certain facts, concepts and generalization to be acquired by pupils but are also presented with relevant and commensurate learning activities, skills and strategies needed to achieve them. This explains why the curriculum is basically problem - approach or problem - oriented in which case each topic (facts, concepts, generalization, etc) are discussed in terms of human problems (dominant societal issues). Thus, the content can be conveniently taught and learned by pupils since the issues and

problems involved are not only relevant to their world view, interest and needs but also suitable to their developmental stage and chronological age (6 – 11+ years) (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1998:13)

Third, the contents of primary and junior secondary school social studies programmes are very practical because they were selected and organized on the basis of the categories of life functions and situations. This possibly informed the integrated nature and attempt at unifying knowledge from the various disciplines in a balanced form. Instructively, social studies content focus on problems and issues of man and groups in the ever-changing physical and social environments and helps in inculcating desirable social habits, attitudes, values and requisite intellectual skills in solving them (Okobia 1984). Therefore, the contents of both curricula are not only intellectually relevant and balanced but also rich and extensive in scope since virtually all the problems of living, interaction and adjustment in society can be adequately solved through interdisciplinary and integrated structure. The primary and junior secondary school social studies school curricular would therefore seem to have been based on life problems and issues in Nigeria which are of significant interest to learners.

A close observation would readily indicate that primary and secondary school social studies contents are not only society – centred but also child-centred. This is because both took into cognisance the place of activities, experiences and strategies which could assist teachers tremendously in achieving the basic curricular goals. Closely examined, these activities are capable of promoting experiences of democratic participation, sharing, co-operation, tolerance etc in learners which are essential to their becoming effective and functional adult citizens. Thus, for the aims of the contents of primary and junior secondary school social studies programmes to be achieved, teachers are encouraged to maximise the use of those outlined activities, skills and strategies which could afford pupils the opportunity to gain required experience in problem solving within and outside the classrooms (Mansaray, 1996). Significantly, if pupils are taught and given opportunity to participate in classroom activities, they will learn and retain facts and information better.

### **Instructional Relevance of the Structure of Social Studies Curriculum**

By its nature, the social studies methodology is tied to integrated philosophy (Adeyemi, 1989). This calls for the use of resource-based and innovative

instructional methods, techniques, skills and strategies by social studies teachers. The implication of this, is that teachers' orientation and understanding of the nature and content of social studies is germane to their utilization of effective instructional methods in the classroom. In other words, the structure of a subject determines its unique methodology.

The planners of both primary and junior secondary school curricular recommended instructional activities and methods that would generally assist teachers and students in the classrooms. These include discussion, role-playing, dramatization, field trips, construction, activity etc. which could possibly be acceptable as some of the tested methods in social studies teaching.

The National policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1998:13 -14) expressed the need for teaching at the primary and lower levels of the secondary schools to emphasize maximum use of those methods which are capable of promoting critical thinking and problem-solving skills in Nigerian pupils. The focus of both curricular is on children between 6 to 12 years and above who fit perfectly into the instructional goals of the National Policy on Education.

By virtue of its integrated nature and philosophy, social studies is highly affective and value - laden. By implication, its task is not merely to teach facts and information but to promote simultaneously the three domains of learning namely cognitive, affective and psychomotor in order to achieve the education of the complete man (Obemeata, 1996). This role distinguishes social studies content from other subjects and by implication imposes on its teaching and learning those instructional methods, activities and experiences that provide social and intellectual skills, positive attitudes, values and cognitive development (Mkpa, 1997). Thus, bearing in mind the fact that social studies is highly affective, teachers are expected to help pupils develop a wide range of positive behaviour traits. The implication is that teachers should be interested in more than just the cognitive development of pupils. Cognitive learning outcomes must be complemented with skills, attitudes and values (Lucan 1981).

Bearing the integrated nature of social studies content in mind, the arduous task before any teacher is on how to fully integrate and use functionally, instructional skills derived from many teaching methods. It must be stressed that no teaching method is the best or utterly useless in absolute terms (Federal Ministry of Education 1983).

The appropriateness or otherwise of a method depends on what is being taught, who is being taught and where he/she is being taught. These pedagogical considerations are taken very seriously in social studies classroom.

Social Studies Teachers are therefore required to teach and deepen the knowledge of the learners in a comprehensive manner to encourage pupils to acquire and use concepts, generalization, skills, facts and information to confront and solve daily life problems.

To achieve this facts, skills, values and attitudes should not be taught and learnt in isolation. Appropriate experiences should be created through relevant activities during lessons. The social studies teacher should therefore encourage open and permissive classroom interactions. This is the whole idea behind functional and resource-based teaching methods which are fundamental to the effective teaching and learning of integrated social studies in Nigerian schools (Federal Ministry of Education 1983; Federal Republic of Nigeria 1998).

To promote effective and integrated teaching of social studies, the teacher according to Mkpa (1997) should ensure the following:

- plan his/her lesson elaborately
- identify the particular content appropriate to the lesson.
- create appropriate opportunities for inculcating relevant knowledge, skills, values and attitudes,
- ensure that knowledge, skills and values acquired are adequately practised by the learners
- Evaluate the performance of the learner to determine what has been achieved.

What the above demands is conceptual and integrated teaching, which as earlier discussed calls for innovative and resource-based instructional skills and strategies which were sufficiently, recommended by social studies curriculum planners for primary and junior secondary schools.

## **Conclusion**

Social studies is an integrated approach to the study of man especially the problems and issues confronting man in his environment. It seeks to emphasize human relationship in order to produce citizens with skills,

competencies, moral values and reasoned judgment to effectively live, interact, interrelate and contribute positively to the economic, social, political and cultural development of the Nigerian Society. These aims informed its integrated nature which in turn demands innovative and resource based instructional skills. The current primary and junior secondary school social studies programmes therefore seem to have the prospect (in terms of goals, content, learning experiences and instructional relevance) of achieving the philosophy and structural demands of integrated approach to learning in Nigeria in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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