

Enhancing Sustainable Development in Nigeria: A Challenge for Social Studies Education

Sebiomo, Bola

*School of Arts and Social Sciences,
Michael Otedola College of Primary Education, Epe, Lagos State, Nigeria*

Doi:10.5901/jesr.2012.v2n9p68

Abstract

This paper examines the roles and effects of Social Studies Education in enhancing sustainable development. It discusses the concepts development, sustainable development and Social Studies. It finally discusses the role of Social Studies in enhancing sustainable development in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Development, Sustainable Development, Social Studies*

Introduction

The concept of sustainable development was popularized in 1987 with the publication and research work of Brandt Land report by the World Commission on Environment and Development. It therefore became universal word for gradual change, advanced growth and increase in the outlook of thing. However, in 1992 the United Nation Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held a meeting in Rio de Janeiro to discuss the planet dwindling resources in the face of an unrestrained economic growth and the failure of human kind to achieve equitable development. The 'Earth Summit' as the UNCED was called resulted into countries agreeing on the Rio Declaration Setting of 27 principles for achieving sustainable development and it was complimented by Agenda 21.

The history of nation is generally characterized by efforts and a determination to gradually but steadily move towards a stage of maturity, and a state of well-being for the individuals that constitute such nations. Nigeria as a nation is blessed with vast human and natural resources several conceited efforts have been made and are still ebing made to properly harness and use these available resources to improve the living conditions of the people through policy initiatives, projects and general infrastructural facilities. However, prevailing conditions in virtually all spheres of life have shown that the nation have not attained the level of development commensurate to its wealth and potentialities to make its teeming population irrespective of geographical location, social status, gender to live comfortably. This has raised lots of concerns and questions. Hence, the need for sustainable development

This paper therefore examines the concept of sustainable development and ways through which Social Studies education can improve the developmental process. The paper finally suggests some methods of achieving sustainable development.

Conceptual Framework

(i) Sustainable Development

The term development generally mean more efficient, more predicting and progressive way of doing things than for previous ways of doing it. Seer, (1997) describes development as involving more than economic growth but also including conditions which people in a country have inadequate food and job and income inequality among them is greatly reduced it.

Sustainable development connotes gradual, continued, advanced growth. Going by the meaning of the term one can deduce that Nigeria is yet to attain sustainable development. It is probably because of this that the country has consistently been listed among developing / underdeveloped nations. Sustainable development has meant different things to different writers; some have tended to focus on production and thus narrowly viewed it as a process of achieving a buoyant economy (Stepanov, 2004; Adesanya, 2004). Other focused on the natural environment (Taranet and Alyona, 2004; Raheem and Ogunyemi, 2004). Some saw it as all about achieving an ecological balance yet for others, it is a process that include all what humanity and nature require for their existence both at the present moment as well as the future (Scoullous, 2004; and Newmon, 2004).

However, sustainable development is a multi-dimensional process involving the re-organization and re-orientation of the entire social, economic, political and all units of the society. It also involves a transformation in the societal values and institution, for the betterment of the society.

(ii) Social Studies

The definition and meaning of Social Studies are many and varied. This is based on the opinion and background of the scholars. Some of these definitions are based on the content of the discipline while others are according to the methods and purpose of the discipline. Generally, Social Studies is regarded as the study of man in his physical and social environment. This definition connotes the relationship of human being and his environment i.e. how human being influences the environment or the reciprocal influence of environment on human activities. The Western Canada Protocol for collaboration in Basic Education (2000) describes Social Studies as the:

Study of people in relation to each other and to their world. It is an inter-disciplinary 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 and technological environment.

In the same vein, Ogundare (2000) describes Social Studies as the study of man and problems of survival in an environment and how to find solution to them. It is also the study of human activity and process of thinking, decision making, value analysis and inquiry skill.

Social Studies is a school subject which emphasizes on human being and his environment. It is therefore an integrated study of man and his environment both physical and social emphasizing on cognition, functional skill and desirable attitude and actions fr the purpose of producing effective citizenry.

Role of Social Studies in Enhancing Sustainable Development

Social Studies as a school subject is concerned with existence relationship between man and his environment. This involves the reciprocal influence of human being on the environment and how human being also influences the environment. However, Social Studies is broad and integrated in nature.

Social Studies helps citizens make informed judgment about the nature of civic life, politics and government, and why politics and government are necessary. Such knowledge will promote the understanding of the nature and importance of civic society in the art of governance. A vital civic society prevents the abuse or excessive concentration of power by government. (Civic framework for the 1998 national assessment of educational progress (NAEP) (U.S.A).

Social Studies work towards the promotion of attitudinal changes in the life of the citizens, with a resultant effect of creating effective citizens. It is in support of the above that Engel (1977) reveals that the teaching of Social Studies in school is expected to contribute to an acquisition and sustenance of desirable attributes characteristics of effect of citizenry within the democratic society. Because attitudes according to Allport (1966), determine for each individual what he will see and hear, what he will think and what he will do, they play a vital role in controlling our emotional responses to our life situations.

Social Studies curriculum intends to promote cultural values and to eschew ethnocentrism. The philosophy guiding the National Policy on Education rests on the integration of the individuals into a sound and effective citizens with equal educational opportunities for all citizens of Nigeria at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981:7).

It is against this background that the National Policy on Education spelt out the following aims and objectives:

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

Based on these national aims and objectives of education, in 1982, the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) on Social Studies identified the following as the proposed objectives of teaching the subjects:

- (a) To create an awareness and an understanding of our evolving social and physical environment as a whole in its natural man-made, cultural and spiritual resources together with the rational use and conservation of these resources for national development.
- (b) To develop a capacity to learn and to acquire certain basic skills, including not only those of listening, speaking, reading and writing, and of calculation, but also those skills of hand and head together with those of observation, analysis and inference which are essential to the forming of a sound social, economic and political judgment.
- (c) To ensure the acquisition of that relevant body of knowledge and information, which is an essential pre-requisite to personal development as well as to a positive personal contribution to the betterment of mankind.
- (d) To develop a sympathetic appreciation of the diversity and interdependence of all members of the local community and the wider national and international community.

- (e) To develop in students positive attitudes of togetherness, comradeship and cooperation towards a healthy nation, the inculcation of appropriate values of honesty, integrity, hardwork, fairness and justice at work and play as one's contribution to the development of the nation.

While these objectives are set out to achieve the national objectives, Ajetunmobi (2000) opines that Social Studies as a course of study is capable of equipping the learners with the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes for the betterment of the society.

Furthermore, Social Studies enhance the knowledge of the learner towards a better understanding of the different ethnic groups in Nigeria as well as their peculiarities. Learners are made to appreciate the unity in diversity as well as the nature of relationship between people of different cultural background.

Students will also learn that the individuals and the nation at large will develop through peaceful relation, borrowing of positive values from one another and the understanding of where a particular group has a comparative advantage over the other groups. Social Studies discourage the spirit of ethnicism through much emphasis on the common values as a nation. Also, through this discipline, students are made to be aware of some of the factors that may inhibit peaceful co-existence or hinder social development of the society at large, as a result, learn to avoid such variables.

Added to this, the learners are exposed to the idea of team spirit, that no individual is an island, and that no ethnic or sub-ethnic group is self sufficient. The spirit of cooperation, love, togetherness, sharing and tolerance are taught through the discipline content. The diversities among different groups on cultural traits are not only taught for the sake of knowledge, but are also taught to be respected and appreciated. Through such respect and appreciation, the inculcation of the spirit of national consciousness and unity is achieved. The discipline gives a unique opportunity for the learners to appreciate the inter-relationship between various disciplines especially in relation to the society.

Conclusion

Sustainable development through Social Studies education can be achieved through envisioning people to imagine the future through critical thinking and reflection by learning to question our current beliefs and to recognize the assumptions underlying our knowledge, perspective and opinion promoting dialogue and negotiation, learning to work together through skills acquisition programmes for ourselves and the future generation. These can be achieved through overcoming the challenges stated in this paper.

Recommendations

- (i) Emphasize on offering Social Studies education not as a subject at senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSCE) or National Certificate Examination (NECO) but also as a core subject in the aforementioned examination in order to achieve its goals for the society.
- (ii) Social Studies education should be made a core subject at the National Policy Institute for senior civil servant and policy makers so that policy makers will be abreast with societal problems and be ready to proffer solutions.

- (iii) Government should make some aspects of Social Studies as a compulsory general course in the tertiary institution in order to sensitize students on the need of social issues in the society.
- (iv) There should be provision for enhancing training facilities and teaching resources and aid.
- (v) Social Studies teachers are expected to be a better model of behaviour for pupils, students and society.
- (vi) Government should encourage in service training programme for Social Studies teacher to enhance their performance in enhancing sustainable development.
- (vii) There should be regular seminar, conference and workshops to Social Studies teachers to improve their teaching skills.
- (viii) Nigerian educational planners should as a matter of urgency, promulgate a functional policy for the study of Social Studies at all level of learning in Nigeria.

References

- Adesanya, L.A. (2004). *Economic Empowerment for Sustainable Development. The Case of a Nigerian Poverty Reduction Project. A Paper Presented on the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, Braga Portugal, May 19-22, 2004.*
- Allport, G.W. (1996). In C.C. Okam (2002) *Reading in New Development in Nigeria Education; Issues and Insight. Jos, Dekka Publication.*
- Centre for Civic Education (1994). *National Standard for Civic Education and Government; Retrieved on 18/10/2010 from Africa Recovery, Vol. II, 4th March, 1998.*
- Engel, S.H. (1977). *Exploring the Meaning of Social Studies. The Inquiry Method Approach. Lagos: Thomas Nelson Limited.*
- Mabogunje, A.I. (1990). *The Development Process as Partial Perspective. London: Hutchinson Ted Publishers Led.*
- Ogundare S.F. (2000). *Cultural Perspectives of Some Nigeria Pupils in Social Studies Classroom: Education Research and Perspectives. Journal of Post-Graduate School, University of Western Australia, vol. 24(1), p 84-93.*
- Raheem, K. and Ogunyemi, B. (2004). *Education for Sustainable Development. The Role of Environmental Education in Developing Countries with Focus on Nigeria. Braga Portugal, May 19-22, 2004.*
- Seer, P. (1977). *The New Meaning of Development. London, International Development Review (3), p 3.*
- Scollon, M. (2004). *Science, Culture and Educational for Sustainable Development Conference. Braga Portugal, May 19-22, 2004.*
- Stepanov, V. (2004). *Ethics in System for Education Ecology Relation, Paper Presented at UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development Conference, Braga Portugal, May 19-22, 2004.*