

CHAPTER TEN

Curriculum Issues in Social Studies

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Abstract

Social Studies like other disciplines cannot be separated from curriculum since it is the learning experiences that are managed and coordinated by experts to increase the learning abilities of students. This paper explored the concepts of Social Studies and curriculum with emphasis on the core areas on which all the learning content of Social Studies is based. Also, what constitutes Social Studies curriculum were clearly identified. Different forms of curriculum were equally highlighted with the aim of bringing about positive changes in students. The place of pedagogical approaches as well as assessment practices in teaching and learning Social Studies were discussed. The paper concluded curriculum issues in Social Studies requires a comprehensive and reflective approach that considers the dynamic nature of society, the diversity of learners, and the goals of Social Studies education. It is therefore recommended that teachers should create meaningful and relevant Social Studies curriculum that prepares students to be informed, engaged, and responsible citizens in an increasingly complex world.

Keywords: Social Studies, Curriculum, Pedagogy, Student, Assessment practice.

Introduction

The main purpose of studying different school courses is to bring about the development of learners. Social Studies is one of the subjects that fall in this category. It is a subject that enables the social and emotional development of learners. The subject also enables learners to ask critical questions in their society. People are embedded with the ability to solve problems and proffer solutions to leading issues in society (Adeyemi & Onigiobi, 2020). Hence, there

is a need to look into the place of curriculum when it comes to the full exploration of Social Studies as a school subject. In this study, the focus is on Social Studies curriculum, its dynamics, demands, and effectiveness.

Defined by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) as “the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence” (NCSS, 2017), Social Studies encompass various fields such as history, geography, economics, political science, sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies. In this bid, Social Studies has been seen as a Social Science discipline that enables the effective growth and development of learners. It has been argued that a good student of Social Studies should be able to reflect on social development and sustainable growth. With this, a full reflection of how Social Studies curriculum should be designed must be explored. This will be done in the unfolding process of this study. This chapter delves into key curriculum issues in Social Studies, exploring topics such as curriculum development, content selection, pedagogical approaches, assessment practices, and the integration of diverse perspectives.

Conceptualization of Social Studies

Social Studies is the study of humans in the context of their environment. It is a discipline that aids the exploration of the human environment such as social, economic, political, and geographical among others (Abubakar, 2013). The study was brought into the Nigerian educational system in the 1970s when some scholars visited the University of Ohio, USA. The purpose of the visit was to investigate the factors that have reduced the rate of social menace in the USA at that time. From the visit, it was found that Social Studies was the school subject introduced in the school curriculum in the USA that increases the rate of positive behaviors and values among students (Ajayi, Amosun, & Ige, 2020). On this note, the content of the subject was brought to Nigeria as a way of ensuring the Nigerian youth engage in positive behaviors and values (Ajayi *et al*, 2020). Similarly, according to the International Bureau of Education (IBE), a UNESCO institute, Social Studies is described as “the study of the

social sciences and humanities in order to promote civic competence and responsibility” (IBE-UNESCO, 2019).

In the same vein, the introduction of the subject to school curriculum has been noted as a good decision to increase the viability of the Nigerian educational system (Mezieobi & Essien, 2016). Another way to see Social Studies is the studying of different subjects such as Civil Education, Social Norms, and Citizenship Education among others. It has been argued that all these subjects are formed from the tents of Social Studies. By implication, Social Studies is a subject that is open to different content and it needs learners to be open-minded in their approach.

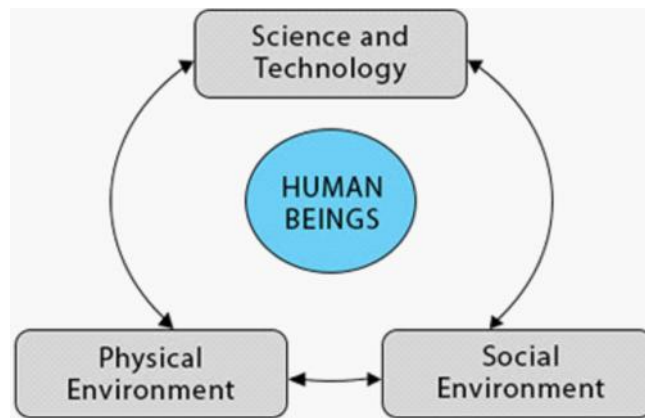


Figure 1: Core Components of Social Studies

Source: Adopted from Al-Shalabi (2016), Mezieobi and Essien (2016)

As noted in Figure 1, there are three main components of Social Studies which are science and technology, physical environment, and social environment. These are the core areas on which all the learning content of Social Studies is based. These are briefly explained as follows.

Science and technology are some parts of Social Studies that enable the adoption of digital technologies in human activities. This falls in the part which enables the place of growth in human society. Unlike in the past, there is a growing need for the use of technologies recently due to the birth of the pandemic (Al-Shalabi, 2016). The

physical environment is another aspect of Social Studies that reflects different courses such as Geography, Geology, and Biology among others. The human physical environment also includes sustainable development and the process of curbing the excesses of industrialization. The social environment revolves around the quality of human interaction based on cultures, values, philosophies, and differences. Humans are social animals and they take social interaction seriously. Social Studies therefore remains prominent in ensuring that quality interaction guides the effectiveness of humans' growth.

What is Social Studies Curriculum?

Social Studies curriculum is a reflection of the integration of different studies to enable the effective development of learners. The Social Studies curriculum is better seen as the short form of Social Sciences. The key components that are included in the Social Studies curriculum are Government, Financial Literacy, Economics, Geography, History, Anthropology, and Sociology (Achor, Zaria, & Achor, 2022). This shows that the Social Studies curriculum should include different components that will engage the criticality of learners. They should be able to interact with people around them effectively and also manage the physical environment actively. Another aspect of the Social Studies curriculum is to increase the functioning of the human society. If human society would be understood from a wide perception, a subject like Social Studies does justice to this. The integrated nature of Social Studies calls for teachers to develop open-mindedness which will increase the abilities of learners. According to the findings of Emile Durkheim, the field of Social Sciences implies that learners should be able to ask questions about everything. Every learner is expected to be skilled and curious about new realities around them. The world is changing. This is the reality with Social Science and Social Studies. When there are changes in the realities of humans, these disciplines enable them to see beyond the surface.

Emergent issues are also addressed through the process of learning Social Studies. Different issues such as the circular economy (Corvellec, Stowell, & Johansson, 2022), the impact of the COVID-

19 pandemic on human activities (Al-rfou, 2021), and evolving nature of educational technologies (Mormah, 2021) among others. The field of Social Studies is therefore not static, it changes over and over. It is unlike some fixed subjects like Philosophy and Psychology. The more there are changes in the human world, Social Studies is always up to the task of defining and exploring these new developments. Children are taught in schools to manage the changes in their culture and values.

With the above-mentioned, it can be stressed that Social Studies curriculum serves as a cornerstone in education, aiming to equip students with essential knowledge, skills, and perspectives to understand and engage with the complexities of society. As the chapter unfolds, curriculum development is defined and explored. Its implication for learning Social Studies in school will also be investigated.

Conceptualizing Curriculum Development

A curriculum has been defined as the forms of learning experiences that are managed and coordinated by experts to increase the learning abilities of students. It has also been seen as the logical organization of learning experiences to increase the competencies of learners (Annala & Mäkinen, 2013). Another way to see curriculum is a written plan to ensure a systematic presentation of lessons to be learned in school (Enenche, 2019). This means that every curriculum is meant to be dynamic, evolving and innovative. The different forms of the curriculum are described as follows.

Open curriculum is a form of learning plan that is open to all students. In some cases, it is also referred to as written curriculum. It includes the school syllabus, lesson plans, and notes. Close curriculum is always engaged during the break periods of learners. They are the ones to determine the activities that they will engage themselves. The social activities of learners also fall within the confines of this kind of curriculum. The known curriculum is based on the activities that are known to learners in school. An example is the use of timetables to determine the activities that will take place every day in school. Unknown curriculum is hinged on children's

development. It is just like the close curriculum. Learners are exposed to sporting and social activities.

The development of Social Studies curriculum involves a multifaceted process that requires careful consideration of educational objectives, standards, and societal needs (Barton & Levstik, 2004). Curriculum developers must navigate through various factors, including national and state standards, educational policies, community values, and disciplinary perspectives, to design a cohesive and meaningful curriculum (Unimna, Essien, Effiom, & Ele, 2020); and on this note, curriculum development should be done in a way that the outcomes must be considered. Every content that will be selected should be to solve problems. After learning through the aid of the curriculum, there should be positive changes among learners.

Content Selection

The selection of content in every curriculum is based on the careful consideration of factors such as balance, inclusivity, ethical considerations, diversity, Developmental appropriateness, significance, authenticity, assessment, flexibility, coherence, relevance, and feedback. In the same vein, the selection of content should not just be to fill in space. It should be addressing real issues. The focus such be on meeting the needs of learners.

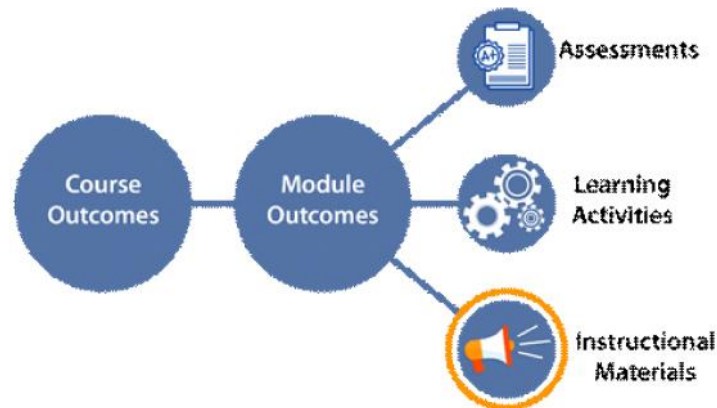


Figure 2: Core Components of Content Selection Social Studies
Source: Adapted from Banks, 2008

To select content in Social Studies, there main factors should be considered (as presented in Figure 2). The use of instructional materials should be considered. More so, the learning activities should be to make sure that learners are innovative in their approach to learning. The methods of assessments should also be flexible. In the presence of these factors, ensuring that learning is effective will be achieved.

One of the central challenges in Social Studies curriculum is selecting relevant and inclusive content that represents diverse perspectives, cultures, and experiences (Banks, 2008). Curriculum developers must strike a balance between covering foundational concepts and addressing contemporary issues while incorporating multiple viewpoints and marginalized voices. Additionally, the globalization of society underscores the importance of including global perspectives in Social Studies curriculum to foster intercultural understanding and global citizenship.

The matters that should be considered when selecting content in Social Studies include the social needs of the learners, and emergent issues in society. Matters around teacher training that requires teachers being grounded to teach the subject are also very essential. There should also be collaborative efforts on the part of educational stakeholders. In addition, the content should be focused on proffering solutions to identified social problems.

Pedagogical Approaches

Effective pedagogy is essential for engaging students in Social Studies learning and promoting critical thinking, inquiry, and civic participation (Wineburg & Martin, 2009). Social Studies teachers employ a variety of pedagogical approaches, including inquiry-based learning, project-based learning, simulations, and experiential learning, to create interactive and meaningful learning experiences. Moreover, integrating technology and multimedia resources can enhance student engagement and facilitate exploration of complex social issues.

Inquiry-based learning is engaged to help learners to ask questions about what they have learned (Audu, Ajayi, & Angura,

2017). In most cases, teachers ask students questions that will make them ponder. With the aid of the questions, students will brainstorm and develop criticality (Audu *et al*, 2017). They can argue for and against (George-Mwangi *et al*, 2018). In this bid, they begin to solve problems on their own with little or no support from teachers.

As the name implies, project-based learning is a system where learners are exposed to different projects (Sudadi, 2019). This is a method that helps learners to develop teamwork among themselves. They learn to communicate among themselves, regardless of their needs and differences (Sudadi, 2019). It has been found that project-based learning aids active learning among learners. With this method, students develop the ability to create small teams to engage in hands-on solutions (Le, 2018).

Simulations are teaching methods that enable learners to emulate the attitudes and characters of learners. Decisions are made by learners based on the scenarios that they are given by teachers. In recent times, learners are provided with virtual reality technologies which aid their learning experiences. They also ask questions about their society when using the pedagogical process of learning.

Experiential learning is about allowing learning experience the content to be taught (Kolb, 1984). This method is very famous in Social Studies. It enables students to go on excursions or fieldwork to experience what they have been taught in the classroom. In other words, they see for themselves.

Assessment Practices

Assessment plays a crucial role in evaluating student learning and informing instructional decisions in Social Studies (Darling-Hammond & Falk, 2013). Formative assessment techniques, such as discussions, debates, and document analysis, provide insights into student understanding and inform ongoing instruction. Summative assessments, including exams, essays, and projects, evaluate students' mastery of content knowledge, critical thinking skills, and ability to apply Social Studies concepts to real-world contexts.

The following are the ways to engage assessment practices in

Social Studies:

Learners can be given essays to write as a way of determining if they have understood the lessons taught. They can also be given projects such as designing a marketplace on cardboard. They can also be asked to paint their favorite cards. Learners also write examinations at the end of the term to determine the level at which they have learned. They can be engaged in a debate. Social gatherings in schools can be used as a platform for learning to argue their views about Social Studies content.

Integration of Diverse Perspectives

Promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion is a fundamental aspect of Social Studies curriculum (Gay, 2010). Curriculum developers and teachers must actively seek out and integrate diverse perspectives, voices, and narratives that reflect the experiences of historically marginalized groups. By incorporating multicultural and social justice perspectives into Social Studies curriculum, teachers can foster empathy, promote social responsibility, and empower students to advocate for positive social change.

Moreover, the dynamic nature of society necessitates ongoing review and revision of Social Studies curriculum to reflect current events, emerging issues, and changing perspectives. According to the submissions of Unimna et al (2020), factors to be put into consideration when designing curriculum are that the psychological needs of learners should be looked into which will help to understand the intellectual capacities of learners for the learners. Also, social needs should also be explored which involves the ability of learners to improve their interactional skills. Environmental outcomes should also be considered because in every curriculum, the development of the human environment should be looked into and that every learning program should have effective outcomes.

Conclusion

Social Studies teachers employ a variety of pedagogical approaches, including inquiry-based learning, project-based learning, simulations, and experiential learning, to create interactive and

meaningful learning experiences. Addressing curriculum issues in Social Studies requires a comprehensive and reflective approach that considers the dynamic nature of society, the diversity of learners, and the goals of Social Studies education.

Suggestion

Stakeholders involved in curriculum planning should create meaningful and relevant Social Studies curriculum that prepares students to be informed, engaged, and responsible citizens in an increasingly complex world.

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