

THE RELEVANCE OF SOCIAL STUDIES AS A CORE SUBJECT IN NIGERIAN JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

The study examined the relevance of social studies as a core subject in Nigerian Junior Secondary Schools. It highlighted on the subjects that make up social studies to include, Geography, Anthropology, Economics, History, Sociology, Civics, Political Science etc. Also the importance, benefits and qualities of purposeful social studies were discussed. The study revealed that social studies is a core subject, based on its relevance according to different nations, for instance for people of **Ethiopia**, social studies is seen as a means to transform the political culture of the people. **Ghana**: it is used as a weapon for economic emancipation. **Japan**: it is used for building the foundation for a democratic society. **Nigeria**: it is used to inculcate nationalism and unity among its diverse people. **Sierra Leone**: see it as a means of improving their self-image after colonial rule. **United States**: view it as the development of social problems solving abilities at one time and also acknowledge for effective citizenship during a different time and as integrated and adapted social sciences for the school. **West Germany**: regard it as a means of developing a new order, as a reaction to different situation as the case may be. The study concluded that by studying social studies, students learn to analyze complex issues, understand diverse perspectives, and develop skills for effective civic participation in the society.

Keywords: Social studies, core subject, and Junior Secondary school.

Introduction

In Nigeria, **Junior Secondary School (JSS)** is the first three years of secondary education, covering grades 7-9. It's a crucial part of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program, which aims to provide free and compulsory education up to JSS 3. JSS follows six years of primary school and is the foundation for senior secondary education (SSS), (Nwachukwu, 2003).

Social Studies as a core subject imply that it is a foundational area of learning that focuses on understanding human societies, cultures, and interactions within a broader context. It aims to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and perspectives needed for informed civic engagement and participation in a diverse and globalized world (Igbogbor, 2000).

Social study is an academic subject, students focus on each year from the time they are in elementary school until they graduate from high school. There are numerous social studies topics, such as geography, economics or sociology. Learning

more about the importance of social studies can help you determine if you are interested in pursuing a career as a social studies teacher. Makinde (2006), defines social studies as a programme, which a society uses to instill in students the knowledge, skills attitudes and action. It considers important relationship human have with each other their world and themselves. Igbogbor, (2000), see it as a program of education, which utilizes the study of human life for the purpose of given children the opportunity to practice solving the problems of crucial importance, both for the individual and society. It is based on the common learning of mans interaction with his social and physical environment. McCarthy (2001), defines it as the study of man and his physical environment. As Igbogbor, (2000) put it, social studies provide people understanding their physical and human environment in order to act as responsible citizens. Newman (2003) defines it as a unit of course or study based on the social sciences e.g. history, geography, economics, psychology, government and anthropology. Social studies came into existence in Nigeria in 1916 when the national

education organisation decided the less emphasis should be placed on memorizing factual information and more preparing people for the future. Such preparation requires that attitudes and skills be taught along side with knowledge. At this time social studies was considered integrated curriculum combining the already established history and geography with newer social studies it should be noted that Nigeria inherited the colonial form of education which upon independence was seen as irrelevant to the need to change the school curriculum for a relevant one become necessary in Nigeria. Also the agitation to formulate policies and change the existing curriculum gained momentum among local elites, farmer and concerned individual. To this end, effort was made to fashion out the type of education future African citizens should have.

Social study as a core subject is basic subject, which enable students offer and study a particularly course in the high institution. There is no special study in the social studies curriculum. It is an inter disciplinary one (Nwachukwu,2003). However, social studies is an important subject that can help students become informed individuals in a variety of areas, such as politics, citizenship, cultural awareness and some general knowledge of world affairs. Students begin taking social studies classes in elementary school to gain a broad understanding of history, geography and cultures around the world. As they get older, they learn more about their civic duties and responsibilities and get a better understanding of how the government and economy work. All of this information can teach learners to be more well-rounded individuals as they embark on life after they graduate from high school.

Social studies, often called social sciences, is a field that explores human behavior, relationships, resources, and institutions. It's an interdisciplinary subject combining geography, anthropology, economics, history, sociology, political science, and civics to offer a comprehensive understanding of society.

Social studies go beyond memorizing historical dates or political theories. It promotes critical thinking and cultural awareness and prepares students to be informed, active citizens. By studying social studies, you learn to analyze complex issues, understand diverse perspectives, and develop skills for effective civic participation.

The goal of social studies education is to instill values like justice, equality, and respect for diversity. It encourages students to think critically about their role in society and the impact of their actions, nurturing individuals who can contribute positively to their communities and the broader world, (Nwachukwu,2003)..

Topics covered in social studies classes from Primary school to Secondary school:

- **Geography:** Geography studies the atmosphere and physical landforms, the people who inhabit locations around the globe and their impact on the world due to populations, land use and available resources.
- **Anthropology:** Anthropology focuses on human societies and how they've developed throughout history.
- **Economics:** Economics studies the production, distribution and use of goods and services by sellers and consumers. There are many topics students can learn about such as business economics, microeconomics, international trade and more.
- **History:** History is the general study of past events. Classes can vary by time period or location, such as a class on American History or a class that covers the world during the 1500s.
- **Sociology:** Sociology focuses on the study of human relationships and seeks to understand the social behaviors between genders, races and families.
- **Civics:** Civics studies the responsibilities and rights of citizens in society.

The content and approach of social studies differs, depending on the needs and conditions of the society or country it serves.

For examples: Anfara, (2008).

- **Ethiopia:** in Ethiopia social studies is seen as a means to transform the political culture of the people.
- **Ghana:** it is used as a weapon for economic

emancipation.

- **Japan:** it is used for building the foundation for a democratic society.
- **Nigeria:** it is used to inculcate nationalism and unity among its diverse people.
- **Sierra Leone:** see it as a means of improving their self-image after colonial rule.
- **United States:** view it as the development of social problems solving abilities at one time and also acknowledge for effective citizenship during a different time and as integrated and adapted social sciences for the school.
- **West Germany:** regard it as a means of developing a new order, as a reaction to different situation as the case may be. The department of curriculum development and evaluation (undated) defines social studies as the study of man, the way he behaves and organizes in group, his relationship with his physical and social environment and interaction with them considering the past, present and emerging in future.

Why Social Studies is important for Students

Students learn skills through social studies that help them succeed in further education as well as life. Here are all the amazing ways learning social studies benefits students and society at large (Nwachukwu, 2003).

1. Better Reading and Learning

Social studies is one area in education where content integration is key. Students are given reading material that corresponds with the current learning topics. Giving reading materials in context helps students become better readers. They also become better learners because they are asked to use analysis and writing to show understanding.

2. Citizen Responsibilities and Values

How can we expect young people to contribute positively to society, engage in discourse, and thrive in a democratic society if they are not exposed to the topics and aspects of history and life that made society the way it is? Students need an understanding of history, political science, culture, and all humanities to be able to understand why it is important to be a good citizen.

3. Cultural Understanding

Students should be exposed to cultures far beyond what they experience personally every day. Not every student has the opportunity to interact with other cultures on a daily basis. We need students to learn about, understand, and appreciate cultural differences if we expect them to have meaningful interactions with people of all backgrounds in the future.

4. Economic Education

Economics is a crucial part of social studies, whether studied on its own, or as a part of history, anthropology, or political science. By learning economics, young people understand how their financial decisions have an impact on their future, as well as the future of society.

5. Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is a part of social studies - students are taught to evaluate others' decisions and make connections between influences and circumstances. Young people get the opportunity to learn from others' mistakes through social sciences.

6. Real-World Understanding

Studying social sciences gives students an understanding of the real world around them. Students learn about places, cultures, and events around the world, what conspired to make them the way they are, and can make inferences about how the rest of the world works.

7. Political Skills

From social studies classes, students learn about government, political ideas, country economy and resources, and more. Students gain political skills by analyzing and evaluating existing systems and imagining the future of the place in which they live.

8. Respect History

History is what made the world the way it is, and it is essential that people study it in order to have an appreciation for and understanding of the way the world works. Learning about history is what makes it possible to learn from the past and plan for the future.

Qualities of Purposeful Social Studies

For social studies to be truly effective, it should embody certain key qualities. These attributes

ensure that the subject educates, engages, and inspires you. Here are the essential qualities of purposeful social studies according to Anfara, (2008).

- **Meaningful:** Social studies should address relevant topics that resonate with students' lives and interests, making the subject more engaging and impactful.
- **Integrative:** This discipline should connect various subjects and real-world experiences, showing how historical events, current affairs, and cultural practices interlink.
- **Value-Based:** Emphasizes core democratic values such as opportunity, justice, and freedom of speech, helping students understand and appreciate their societal roles.
- **Challenging:** Encourages critical thinking and in-depth analysis of social issues, prompting students to question, evaluate, and form their own informed opinions.
- **Active:** Engages students with interactive activities like debates, discussions, and simulations, making learning dynamic and helping them apply their knowledge to real-world situations.

The educational system requires students to take social studies throughout schooling during their primary and secondary education. Although some students do not understand why they take social studies classes each year.

These are some of the benefits according to Nwachukwu (2003), for studying social studies. They include;

1. Have better spatial awareness

Social studies can help students gain a better interpretation of the physical world. Rather than using the internet to find the location of a country, they can look at a globe or physical map in their textbook. With more spatial awareness, they can more easily determine the physical distance between their locations and other countries around the world. It may also encourage learners to explore the different regions of the world through the use of magazines, videos, pictures and interactive maps. Social studies classes such as geography can also teach students what cardinal

directions are and how to locate North, South, East and West on a map. Students can use these skills to help themselves get from place to place when looking at a map if they were ever without a GPS on their phones. Nwachukwu, C. C. (2003).

2. Learn critical thinking skills

As students learn about different aspects of social studies, they can gain critical thinking skills, such as the ability to understand the relationship between two ideas, build logical arguments, approach challenges carefully and reflect neutrally on others' beliefs and values. With these skills, they can look at decisions made in history and analyze the advantages and disadvantages of those choices. They may consider how they would have handled certain situations differently and how society might have changed if leaders had taken different actions. Learners can also use their understanding of past decisions to make informed choices about the future

3. Gain citizenship skills

Social studies classes teach students they are part of a society that requires structure to operate well. This begins in elementary school when students work together to create and follow classroom rules. It continues as they get older and study the branches of government, the electoral process and how citizens interact in a society governed by laws. The curriculum in many schools also compares the United States government to foreign governments where students can use critical thinking skills to analyze the differences in various governing systems.

4. Increase cultural awareness

Students have many opportunities in their social studies classes to gain a larger understanding of the cultures in other countries. As they learn about the physical geography of other locations around the world, they can learn the cultural differences by studying the foundations of sociology and anthropology. As they discover the differences, many begin to see the similarities as well. When instructors give students the opportunity to experience other cultures through videos, interactive maps, discussions and pictures, they are more likely to have meaningful experiences with people of different backgrounds in the future.

5. Receive understanding of economics

As students get older, they begin to gain a broad understanding of basic economics. Learning about the economy can give learners a better idea of how

their financial decisions can affect their future and the future of civilization. They also learn concepts such as the four factors of production, what a recession is and how it can impact the country's economy and how to handle their own finances.

6. Have respect for the past

Studying the history of the world gives many students an appreciation and respect for the past. When learners know about the past, they can better understand that history made the world as it is now. Recounting the biographies of others and the rise and fall of past civilizations makes it possible to learn from the past and plan for a better future.

7. Increase knowledge of world affairs

Because social studies topics cover such a broad range of topics, learners can get a better grasp of past and current world affairs. They have the chance to learn about political affiliations, conflicts and alliances between countries. This can give students a clearer understanding of how countries work together to create a functioning world. Students can also learn other aspects of world affairs, such as the financial interests of various regions, human rights and social issues and how they differ based on cultural and social influences within each region.

8. Develop skills for cross-curricular learning

Social studies also teach students skills they can use in other subjects as well. Non-fiction texts found in social studies books can help students develop higher-order thinking skills, such as problem-solving, visualizing, questioning and thinking creatively. Depending on the higher-order skill they're learning in class, the use of pictures, maps, charts and graphs can teach them to interpret and analyze information more thoroughly. Studying social studies topics like geography also helps students develop the abilities to read and process text features in non-fiction text, which they often see in other academic subjects, such as science and English. Text features include things like the index, headings, bold words, sidebars and glossary. Lastly, social studies can help students build their vocabulary and teach them how to

understand context clues to determine a word's meaning by seeing it in context with other, more familiar, words.

9. Learn more about current events

Many social studies classes focus on economics, cultural differences or societal changes, which provides a conducive environment for discussing current events around the world. Discussing current events in a social studies class can help students gain a deeper real-world understanding of their own government and the government of other countries. Teachers can conduct instructor-led discussions about different current events, such as elections or changes in the economy, to teach students how to analyze and debate their differing opinions with civility and respect for others.

Conclusion

The relevance of social studies as a core subject in Nigerian Junior Secondary Schools cannot be over emphasized. Social studies, often called social sciences, is a field that explores human behavior, relationships, resources, and institutions. It's an interdisciplinary subject combining geography, anthropology, economics, history, sociology, political science, and civics to offer a comprehensive understanding of society (Igbogbor, 2000). Social studies go beyond memorizing historical dates or political theories. It promotes critical thinking and cultural awareness and prepares students to be informed, active citizens. By studying social studies, students learn to analyze complex issues, understand diverse perspectives, and develop skills for effective civic participation. Social studies, often called social sciences, is a field that explores human behavior, relationships, resources, and institutions. It's an interdisciplinary subject combining geography, anthropology, economics, history, sociology, political science, and civics to offer a comprehensive understanding of society. By studying social studies, students learn to analyze complex issues, understand diverse perspectives, and develop skills for effective civic participation.

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