

# **SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM AND CULTURAL INTEGRATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study discusses the meaning and objective of early childhood education, cultural values and integration, social studies curriculum content and social studies integration of cultural values in early childhood education. Though Nigeria is a multi-cultural nation, through the study of social studies children are introduced early in life to the different cultural practices within the country. As children move out of their own cultural environment to other places, the cultural values practiced where they have moved to may not be new to them. They easily learn to imbibe these practices and even learn new languages, as they move about their businesses everyday. It was concluded that through the awareness of these different cultural values children may learn to live in peace with one another.

## **Introduction**

Nigeria is a vast nation with different cultural groups. These groups have different cultural practices, different norms, values, and languages from other groups. Though people come from different cultural groups, many people prefer to live out of their communities. In one town therefore, one can find people from different cultural background. In the years past people from different communities and cultural groups have had problems leading to wars because of lack of understanding of the different cultural practices and languages.

In the present day, every one wants to live in peace and harmony with one another. People have become interested in learning other people's culture and speak other peoples languages so that they can interact with people who may not be from their own cultural or language group. Social studies as a course of study helps to link these cultural groups by giving the children opportunity to study other peoples culture other than their own.

The general aim of education is to provide learners with the basic skills that will make them become useful and productive citizens of the society where they are found.

Education at an early age is very important. Piaget (1952) long ago revealed that the first five years of life are very important because they lay the foundation of later adult life. Also Hess and Craft (1975) maintained that Early Childhood Education is desirable since both the children's ability to learn and their actual achievement in later life are influenced by early experience. It is a good idea therefore to introduce the children to the skills, values, norms and tradition of one's own culture and other peoples culture early so that they can grow with it and become used to such ideas at home, at school, or where ever the child may be found.

Social studies programme is a well structured programme that helps to ensure the inculcation of the virtues, norms, skills, of the different cultural groups within the country. Through social studies children become aware of the different cultural practices, languages, mode of dressing, agricultural practices within and around their communities as well as other parts of the nation.

## **THE MEANING AND OBJECTIVES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

Early Childhood Education as referred to in the National Policy On Education (2004) "is the

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education given in an educational institution to children prior to their entering the primary school." It includes the crèche, the nursery and the kindergarten. Early childhood education is accepted in many parts of the world but the practice and content may vary. Many scholars see this level of education as a preparation for more formal education given in the primary school. This preparation at this stage is necessary as Uba, (2006) maintains that at this stage the child requires stimulation in the environment that enhances the formation of physical, social and mental development.

The purpose of pre-primary or early childhood education according to the National Policy on Education (2004) shall be to:

- i) Effect a smooth transition from the home to school;
- ii) Prepare the child for the primary level of education;
- iii) Provide adequate care and supervision for the children, while their parents are at work (on the farms, in the markets, offices etc);
- iv) Inculcate social norms;
- v) Inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiring and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment art, music and playing with toys etc;
- vi) Develop a sense of co-operation and team spirit;
- vii) Learn good habits, especially good-health habits and
- viii) Teach rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes forms etc. through play.

### CULTURAL VALUES AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION

People may be different by their origin geographically or biologically, yet they share common similarities and social ties. It is a common knowledge that the bond between human beings could result from cultural affiliation. A culture is the composite of the enduring behaviours, ideas, attitudes, and traditions shared by a large group of people and transmitted from one generation to the next (Brislin 1988).

All cultural groups from homogeneous nations to motor cycle gangs evolve their own social norms, their rules for accepted and expected behaviour. For instance Muslims use only the right hand's finger for eating. The Japanese have norms for taking shoes off, for

giving and opening gifts, and for showing respect to ones social superiors (Myers, 1992) norms grease the social machinery.

Culture no doubt contributes to social integration. The coming together of people in different spheres of life for whatsoever has social expression and cultural bases. One of such trends in the world is the movement of people from one place to another. To be accepted willingly and easily by the natives is for the emigrant to accept the peoples culture. Cultural elements such as languages, food and dressing count significantly in the process of settling in the new environment. Though in another cultural background the new people must have to learn and if possible practice some of the cultural norms and values they have come to meet. As they settle among the owners of the land they do not entirely forget about their own root. As they live together they must certainly segregate. This discrimination compels the settlers to source for alternative means to live more conveniently. This often leads to establishing new settlements. This is evident in most cities and towns in Nigeria. The Ibos, Yorubas, Efiks, etc in the Northern Nigeria are found in distinct locations from the original settlers e.g. areas such as "Sabongarie". The Hausas/Fulanis who migrate to settle in the south are found in areas such as "Bogaberi" and "Abakpa". These can be found in cities and towns such as Calabar, Lagos, Enugu, Ibadan, Shagamu etc. The reason for these "special" settlements are not far fetched:

- They practice their culture without molestation within such settlements
- Form resistance groups to counter external attacks.
- Collect and distribute the kind of good suitable to their tradition.
- Wear the pattern of dress associated with themselves
- Maintain communication in their language.

Chiefs and community leaders are enthroned by the emigrants in the foreign land. It is also common that people who visit such towns from their state of origin would conveniently find their delicacies e.g. Amala and Ewedu for the Ibos, and Garri and Afang soup or Edikang Ikong soup for the Efiks and Ibibios.

While these cultural practices of the settlers go on, the owners of the land watch and sometimes imitate those values they admire and

sometimes internalize them. While the owners of the land do this, the settlers also do the same sometimes some children can be found speaking both languages. Very often too inter marriages occur between the settlers and the indigenes.

**SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM CONTENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

Social studies according to Esu and Inyang Abia (2004) is an integrated study of man and the outcome of his interaction with the environment. It may also be described as an interdisciplinary subject, which enables the learner to acquire wide knowledge of things or event around them. In its integrated nature, social studies takes into consideration other subject areas where man is found struggling to find solution to his everyday problem.

One of the purposes of early childhood education as stated in the National Policy on Education (2004) is to inculcate social norms. This covers the tradition and cultural aspects of the people. Also on its emphasis on social studies, the National Policy on Education stresses that the curriculum content for pre-primary education should include the inculcation of social norms, spirit of enquiry, creativity through exploration of nature, the environment, arts and music co-operation and team spirit and good health. Thus at an early stage in life children are exposed to the social and cultural way of life of other people in the country. By this they can easily imitate the good aspects of such cultural values and at the same time feel confident that they are one with people from other cultural background.

Uyoata (1998) is of the opinion that the general pattern of the curriculum content of social studies follows a "spiral" or "expanding horizon" format in which man is at the centre and all other attribute of the environment arranged around him. The curriculum content of pre-primary education therefore, may include cultural festivals, agricultural practices, different religious practices, traditional government, dressing code, type of food, music and dancing greetings, types of houses, medical care and hygiene. All these cover all aspects of man's interaction with his environment.

**SOCIAL STUDIES AND SOCIAL INTERACTION OF CULTURAL VALUES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

Culture simply put, is the way of life of a particular people. Obiofia (1988) believes that the

culture of any group of people in any community is the combination of their custom and tradition. To him, custom is the way people have agreed to do their things. While tradition is made up of the beliefs, opinions, practices and usages developed after many years. There are different components of our culture. These are expressed in words such as dress, adorn, eat, marry, dance, greet and worship.

Social studies being an integrated subject can conveniently be used in cultural integration in early childhood since all these are taught at the early childhood level of education.

Zwalchir, and Obanya (2001) say social studies transmits culture through dramatization, role-play and or discussion in the class, pupils will learn the positive value of caring and sharing which is part of the Nigerian culture.

Language is an aspect of culture and Uyoata (1998) writes on the provision of the national policy regarding the medium of instruction in early childhood education, it is the mother tongue or language of the immediate environment. He believes that the culture tied up with a particular language enhances that culture.

Also, Modo (2000) supports this by saying that Nigeria has recognized the fact that language is an important cultural factor of unity, that is why it is stated in the National Policy On Education (2004) that in the interest of national unity it is expedient that every child shall be required to learn one of the three Nigerian languages Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, but this is not practiced in all the schools.

Social studies emphasizes good leadership and fellowship. As children learn to be good leaders of their communities right from their early ages, this will make them good leaders not only of their communities but where ever they find themselves, since they have been exposed to the traditional system of leadership in the different ethnic groups in the country.

Kissock (1980) has it that social studies encourages good relationship among and between people and communities. This helps people to understand themselves and their ways of life thus, reducing conflicts, violence and riots in societies. He maintains that this can be taught through the use of film and slides shown in the classroom, through play, role play and other strategies.

On greetings, people exchange greetings in all parts of the country but the style differs from tribe to tribe. In the Eastern part of the country, Obiofia (1988) explains the youths normally

salute their elders with two hands joined together. While in the west Youths normally prostrate in order to salute their elders with enough respect. Even though there are differences in the styles of greetings, children are exposed to all of them through social studies so that they will know when and where to use which style in order to feel at home.

Through social studies, pupils learn the different ways of dressing by people from different cultural backgrounds. The Yoruba women wear Buba while the men wear "Agbada", the Ibo women wear two wrappers and a blouse while their men wear big wrapper and a shirt. This could be taught through dramatization as the children could be shared into groups, some dress in the Yoruba manner, others Ibo and Efik or Ibibio.

Through social studies too we have learnt to eat the food stuffs found in other ethnic groups. Food items such as Amala and Ewedu for Yorubas, Edikang Ikong and Afang Soup for the Efiks and Ibibios. Tuwon Chinkafa, Tuwon Masara, Miyan, Karikashie for the Housas, Beneseed and Locus been for the tivs and the middle belt. These are all delicacies in the different cultural background. Social studies also helps in cultural integration by exposing children to the different festivals e.g. New yam festival, fishing festival, etc. Thus children know that there are different festivals celebrated by the different ethnic groups and none is more important than the other. Children will not look down on any festival celebrated by any other group of people but will know that such a festival is as important as theirs.

Children also learn that there are different styles of dancing, music and drumming rhythms among Nigerians. They could learn these through role play, dramatization and film shows in the classroom.

### SUMMARY / CONCLUSION

Social studies, studies man in his entity. Culture as we have seen covers all aspects of man and his interaction in his environment so we could equally say that social studies is the study of man and his way of life which is his culture. Thus, when social studies is effectively taught in school, pupils will learn the ways of life of the people around them as presented in the class. Thus drawing them closer as they try to imitate their ways of life. This brings about cultural integration. Early childhood education is not yet part of Nigeria's public education system. It is established and run by private bodies, the

government only encourages them. This explains why some of these schools do not comply with the laid down rules by the government. Thus the approved curriculum guidelines are not strictly followed in some of the schools. This will not encourage cultural integration since what is taught will not really give the children what they need

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- i) As Ali and Ibuzo (1988) rightly say, that most people think and function better in the language they are familiar with, the government should through their supervisory agencies ensure that the language of instruction in early childhood education is the mother tongue or language of the environment and that the three major Nigerian languages should be taught so that this will help in cultural integration.
- ii) Qualified and sound social studies teachers who know what to teach should be employed so that they will teach the right types of norms, values and traditions of the society.
- iii) We have learnt in this study as rightly observed by Ekuealor, et al (1999) and Kissock (1980), that through the study of social studies people learn to live in peace with one another, it is therefore recommended that social studies be made a compulsory subject for all students.

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