

**SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION AS MEGA-FORCE IN PROMOTING GOOD  
GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA**

**By**

**JIMOH, Kayode Ibrahim**

*Social Studies Unit*

*Department of Arts and Social Sciences*

*School of Junior Secondary Education*

*Kwara State College of Education, Ilorin, Nigeria*

*e-mail: [jimohibrahim458\(5\)gmail.com](mailto:jimohibrahim458(5)gmail.com)*

*Phone No: 08035799209*

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## **Abstract**

*Social studies education is a problem-solving discipline. The subject has been viewed as both a course of study and a way of life. It is aimed at producing effective citizenry who are fully equipped with skills, values and attitudes to enable them to relate in a non-conflicted way in the society. The development of good governance is at the heart of Social Studies Education as it tries to assist through its teachings to attain its philosophical goals. This paper discusses the promotion of good governance in Nigeria and the lapses that are embedded in it. It also looks at the nature and objectives of Social Studies, and how the subject can be used to ensure a hitch-free society. Finally, it offered some recommendations among which are, the need for adequate funds for Social Studies instructional materials, the need for Social Studies teachers to attend seminars, workshops, conferences and to undergo in-service training programmes for effective service delivery and the need for full implementation of senior secondary Social Studies curriculum that has approved but yet to take-off.*

## **Introduction**

The ultimate aim of Social Studies Education is to breed effective citizenry who are useful to themselves, their families, communities and the nation at large. However, AERO (2011) has observed that "for all the arguments, convention speeches, the term citizenship lies at the heart of Social Studies".

For Nigerian citizens to be fully responsive and globalized world, they need some basic skills that will assist them to relate effectively in a non-conflictual manner in any human environment they may find themselves at a particular point in time. The good governance enable citizens to function effectively and benefit maximally in any form of environment they found themselves. Social Studies education, through its teaching and advocates, promote good governance that ensures success and overall development. It is against this background that this paper examined the place of Social Studies Education in promoting good governance in Nigeria.

## **Good Governance Defined**

Good governance is an indeterminate term used in international development literature to describe how public institutions conduct public affairs and manage public resources. Governance is "the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented)". The term governance can apply to corporate,

international, national, local governance or to the interactions between other sectors of society.

The concept of "good governance" often emerges as a model to compare ineffective economies or political bodies with viable economies and political bodies. The concept enters around the responsibility of governments and governing bodies to meet the needs of the masses as opposed to select groups in society. Liberal democratic states, concentrated in Europe and the Americas, are often used to set the standards to compare to other states' institutions when talking about governance. Aid organisations and the authorities of developed countries often will focus the meaning of "good governance" to a set of requirements that conform to the organisation's agenda, making "good governance" imply many different things in many different contexts.

### **Promoting Good Governance**

Good governance as expressed through factors like reliability, predictability and accountability is increasingly seen as a key factor in ensuring national prosperity. However, many aspects of the relationship between good governance and national prosperity are still poorly understood and may indeed vary across countries.

Some basic questions include:

- What is good governance and why is it important for economic and social development?
- What is the role of such factors as the rule of law, transparency, accountability and public service ethics in promoting good governance?
- How can good governance be promoted in transition to more open and democratic societies?

Recent economic and social developments have increased attention given to the role that good governance plays in achieving social and economic development.

- Public management reforms have been a key factor in improving capacities of OECD countries to address issues such as budget deficits; external pressures on competitiveness, not least as a result of growing globalization; perceived lack of public confidence in government; growing needs for services; and increasing demands for better and more responsive services.

- There is also a growing recognition that the current world financial crisis stems from weaknesses in the institutions of governance, and that durable solutions to this crisis need to address these governance problems.

Systems of governance affect the performance of the state in executing its core functions and through this, the performance of countries in meeting their major economic and social goals.

- Governments create the conditions for functioning of markets, operation of private firms, strength of civil society, and welfare of communities and individuals.
- The quality of governance is recognised as fundamental to ensuring the quality of life of citizens.
- In its own right, good governance is important as a determinant of the sustainability and strength of democracies.

Good government depends on an ability to exercise power, and to make good decisions over time, across a spectrum of economic, social, environmental and other areas. This is linked with the government's capacity for knowledge, mediation, resource allocation, implementation and maintenance of key relationships.

Governance and good governance requires these key factors:

- Technical and managerial competence
- Organisational capacity
- Reliability, predictability and the rule of law
- Accountability
- Transparency and open information systems
- Participation

### **Technical and Managerial Competence**

Technical and managerial competence of civil servants is an obvious factor of good governance. This may be less of a constraint than it used to be, as access to education has improved, but rapid changes require ongoing development of skills.

### **Organisational Capacity**

Good governance has to be built on the quality of organisations so that development is based on this rather than simply relying only on political will, personal will of a strong leader and state power, which may not be sustainable over the longer term.

Having skilled staff is not sufficient if the government organisations do not have the capacity to make good use of these skills. Capacity of government organisations is a key factor in the provision of many important services to businesses and the public, and in creating conditions for economic progress and social cohesion.

The organisational structure and management systems of government have been reformed in many OECD countries. The problem was often seen as excessive centralisation, inflexibility and lack of efficiency. The key response to this has been to provide managers and staff with more autonomy in operational issues in return for more accountability for performance. In other countries the problem may be a lack of regularity and discipline in the administration, often with associated corruption. In such situations, the response typically will need to focus on strengthening the basic management systems of government, involving to a certain extent increased bureaucratisation.

### **Reliability, Predictability and the Rule of Law**

The rule of law refers to the institutional process of setting, interpreting and implementing laws and other regulations. It means that decisions taken by government must be founded in law and that private firms and individuals are protected from arbitrary decisions. Reliability requires governance that is free from distortionary incentives – through corruption, nepotism, patronage or capture by narrow private interest groups; guarantees property and personal rights; and achieves some sort of social stability. This provides a degree of reliability and predictability that is essential for firms and individuals to take good decisions.

Reliability and predictability do not mean that the more specific the regulations are the better. Excessive specification can lead to rigidities and risk of selective application of regulations. Interpretation and effective implementation of individual regulations requires a degree of discretion. This discretion can be counterbalanced by administrative procedure legislation and external reviews of decisions (appeal mechanisms, judicial review, ombudsmen, etc.).

Reliability and predictability require certain degree of political stability. Governments need to be able to make credible commitments and persuade the private sector that decisions will not ultimately be reversed due to political uncertainty. While this is not necessarily related to a particular political system in the short term, over the longer term democracy

enhances stability by giving a voice to citizens to express their preferences through an open competition. Accountability

### **Accountability**

Accountability can be both an end in itself - representing democratic values - and a means towards the development of more efficient and effective organisations. Politicians and public servants are given enormous power through the laws and regulations they implement, resources they control and the organisations they manage. Accountability is a key way about who is accountable to whom for what and that civil servants, organisations and politicians are held accountable for their decisions and performance.

Accountability can be strengthened through formal reporting requirements and external scrutiny (such as an independent Audit Office, Ombudsmen, etc.). Democratic accountability, as represented by accountability of ministers to parliament and the parliament to voters, can be seen as objective in itself, but it also strengthens accountability in general. Many OECD countries are strengthening accountability through more focus on accountability for performance as opposed to limiting accountability to regularity of decisions.

### **Transparency and Open Information Systems**

Transparency is an important aspect of good governance, and transparent decision making is critical for the private sector to make sound decisions and investments. Accountability and the rule of law require openness and good information so higher levels of administration, external reviewers and the general public can verify performance and compliance to law.

Governments have access to a vast amount of important information. Dissemination of this information through transparency and open information systems can provide specific information that firms and individuals need to have to be able to make good decisions. Capital markets depend for example on information openness.

### **Participation**

Participation can involve consultation in the development of policies and decisionmaking, elections and other democratic processes. Participation gives governments access to important information about the needs and priorities of individuals, communities and private business. Governments that involve the public, will be in a better position to make good decisions, and decisions will enjoy more support once taken. While there may not be direct links between democracy and every aspect of good governance, clearly accountability,

transparency and participation are reinforced by democracy, and themselves are factors in support of democratic quality.

### **Concept of Social Studies Education**

It would not be an overstatement to confidently state that few subject areas or field of inquiry have experienced the degree of controversy and heated debates as that of Social Studies Education. This controversy is, in no small way, due to the fact that over the years a number of competing views have emerged with respect to the contents and best strategies for achieving the main goals of Social Studies Education. In addition, Social Studies Education, according to Howe and Marshal (1999), has not been immune to the wider debates and controversies which have characterised virtually every aspect of education, including pedagogical practices, and education's role in society and national development. However, Chula (2006) defined Social Studies Education as a "programme of study which society uses to instill in students the knowledge, skills, attitude and actions it considers important concerning the relationship human being has with each other; their world and themselves". Similarly, Muhammed (2012) posited that: "Social Studies is the study of man, as he interacts with different environments. This could be physical, social, political, economic or cultural environments". According to Olobou (2010), Social Studies is "the integrated study of man as he battles for survival in the environment both physical and social environments. It promotes awareness, appreciation, and understanding of the reciprocal relationship between man and the environment. The essence of studying Social Studies is to make out of learners, persons who are responsive and responsible citizens". According to Omooba, Obi and Olabode (2008), Social Studies "is a programme of study which a Social Studies teacher uses to instill in students the knowledge, skills, attitudes and actions it considers important concerning to relationship human beings have with one another, their world and themselves". According to Mezieobi, Fubara (2008), Social Studies may be simply defined as an integrative field of study which probes man's symbiotic relationships with his environments endows man with the reflective or contemplative capacities, intellectual, affective, social and work skills, to enable him understand his world and its problems, and to rationally solve or cope with them for effective living in the society".

Therefore, looking at various conceptions of Social Studies education different Social Studies educators above, it can be deduced that man is at the centre of Social Studies Education as he relates with his physical, social, economic, political, technological,

educational, cultural/traditional environment among others. However, considering the complexities and dynamism of man's interaction in the aforementioned environments, Social Studies Education always gives priority to inculcating those skills that will assist man to interact and relate effectively in these environments in a non-conflictual manner. Among these skills for effective living and interactions in the society which Social Studies education programme promote good governance skills. Good governance enables men to relate functions and positively contribute to the development of the society. It also enables man to relate and functions effectively in a non-conflictual way in all the aforementioned environments.

### **The Nature of Social Studies a Problem Solving Discipline**

The United States of National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) (1991) had declared that one of the anticipated outcomes of Social Studies Education is "a sense of efficiency in analyzing and predicting in contemporary affairs, public policy matters and global issues" as well as "commitment to democratic values and ethical standards". Based on this declaration, Social Studies, if well taught by the teachers and properly internalized by the students has the potentials of solving the problems of good governance in Nigeria.

Social Studies in Nigeria has a special task to perform in transforming Nigeria into a modern state, healing the social and political wounds of the past and engendering constructive reforms to make the nation a just and progressive society. Ndubusi (1984) asserted that the teaching and learning of Social Studies will also foster the desire for self-reliance, national efficiency and national pride.

The philosophy of the Nigerian Social Studies programme focused on man as he influences and as he is, in turn, influenced by his environments. The Social Studies curriculum does not list facts to be memorized, skills to be practised, and values to be imitated in isolation. The selection of the content was guided by a comprehensive view of how men can be mobilized and helped to solve the problems he is bound to encounter as he interacts with his ever changing environment (Akinlaye, 1988).

The basic goal of Social Studies Education has long been established by specialists like Adaralegbe (1990), Adedoyin (1981), Akinleye (1980) and Makinde (1979). The goals include preparing the young people to be immune, rational, skillful on decision-making, participating, and responsible citizens in a world that is becoming increasingly complex and interdependent. By understanding human relationship. Social Studies aims at producing citizens with skills, competencies, moral values and seasoned judgement who effectively live

and contribute positively to the economic, social and political development of the Nigerian society.

### **Problems of Governance in Nigeria which Social Studies can Solve**

The African Social Studies Programme (ASSP), when launched at a conference in Mombasa in 1968, introduced Social Studies into the curriculum of all African countries. It was emphasized that Social Studies curriculum should be adapted in African countries to suit their peculiar needs, problems and aspirations. Since Social Studies is culture bound, it has the capabilities of solving most of the problems of governance in Nigeria.

Firstly, there is the necessity for federation to be pragmatic (Schmitt, 1966). Viable federal constitutions are those which have been able to adapt themselves to the socio-political conditions under which they are born. It is pertinent to note that while addressing good governance, it must be related to federalism. Federalism, according to Schmitts (1966), is marked by its flexibility. There is not federalism but there is much federalism as federations. Federalism has been used sometimes to mean different things by different countries. It has been used in Switzerland to solve conflicts, in United States, to strengthen an efficient structure, in Australia, to take into account current history, in Germany, Federation is used to maintain a relatively weak state. In Nigeria, federalism should be used to unite the varying ethnic groups that make up the country. However, this has not been able to take place and there are problems here and there and, in turn, affects good governance in Nigeria which the learning of Social Studies can solve. The problems that inhibit good governance in Nigeria include:

1. **There has been the Problem of Division of Powers:** To solve this problem, the London constitutional conference held in 1953 and the continuation of the conference in Lagos in 1954 had provided some solutions below:
  - a) the State Government should in the sphere of activities assigned to them, be more independent of the central government;
  - b) the residual functions should be vested in the state government.

All these are parts of the facts instilled on the students in the teaching and learning of Social Studies right from youth.

2. **Weakness of the Nigerian Legislative Houses:** Oyediran (1996) commented that the weakness of the legislative houses was a carry-over from the colonial days when the legislative was regarded as simply "a talking shop". The 1979 constitution provided

for a strong and eminent position for the legislative, but the members of the legislative in some ways misused the position assigned them by that constitution. The necessary amendment in this area is to reform the numerical strength in the state legislatures and providing for legislators to be accountable. Social Studies as a subject which teaches all the attributes and skills needed for good citizenship is capable of imbuing accountability and moderation in students right from the primary school level. In fact, accountability is one of the goals of Social Studies.

3. Another problem of good governance in Nigeria is that of the executive arm of government, though not weak, but it often takes on more than it can manage whether constitutionally or otherwise. So there is the need to curb the excesses of the executive (Oyediran, 1996). Social Studies is a discipline that teaches moderation and thoroughness and the discipline should be able to solve the problem of executive managing what are not constitutionally assigned to them.
4. Another problem is that the judiciary has been weakened in the country. The role of the judiciary has been provided by the different constitutions in the country. It is necessary to create a conducive environment, willingness and ability by the leadership of this country to give an adequate sense of direction and purpose to the judiciary. This can be handled by Social Studies because the discipline teaches the duties of leaders and followers right from the elementary classes.

## **Conclusion**

The primary purpose of Social Studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world. Engaging students in the pursuit of active informed citizenship will require a broad range of understandings and skills. It will also require an articulated curriculum which connects students to the social world through informed instructional experiences led by teachers who are committed to active civic participation. Social Studies in the senior secondary school level in the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the National Policy on Education (NPE). The subject was introduced in the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the NPE published in 1998 to be offered as an alternative to History, Geography, Government or interactive in English, but it was removed in the 4<sup>n</sup> edition, published in 2004. If this abnormality is refined, most of the problems emanating from good governance in Nigeria would be solved by the teaching and learning of Social Studies.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations were made by Social Studies Education for effective promotion of good governance in Nigeria:

- i. There is the need for periodic review of social studies education curriculum to enable it to stand the test of time.
- ii. There is the urgent need for government to provide more funds to education industry to enable it to discharge its responsibilities effectively. The government should implement the recommendation of the United Nations urging developing countries to set aside 26% of their annual budgetary allocations to service of education industry. This will help in providing the much need funds to secure relevant social instructional materials and resources for effective service delivery.
- iii. There is also the need for Social Studies teachers to attend seminars, conferences and workshops. These will assist them to continuously update their knowledge and skills. The authorities concerned should allow them to embark on in-service training as a means of developing them intellectually and otherwise for maximum outcome.
- iv. The teaching of social studies should encourage teacher-learner interactions. Also, activity and task-oriented approaches to teaching of Social Studies should be encouraged. This in turn helps in promoting good governance among citizenry.

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