



Review

Environmental and social studies education: A collaborative approach towards building an environmentally friendly society

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Abstract

This paper reveals the mutual link between social studies and environmental education and the effective utilization of such relationship to the realization of a worthwhile environment in Nigeria. It is agreed that man influences environment and environment, to certain extent dictates man's activities. Based on this, curriculum planners recognized the importance of a clean and safe environment that is why environmental studies are taught at the tertiary levels of our education system. One therefore wonders why environmental education is not reflected as a curriculum package at the post-primary level. Thus, environmental education is very important especially, at the era of "Re-branding Nigeria project" to sensitize the Nigeria populace of the danger of unsafe environment and project image to the outside world. In the light of this, the paper further stressed that environment issues call for a collaborative curriculum approach to correct the negative behaviour of man by building an environmental friendly society. In essence, the paper discusses environmental education, man and his environment, environmental problems in Nigeria, link between social studies and environmental education and collaborative approach as a solution to environmental problems. Some recommendations such as a call for separate environmental education curriculum were made to conclude the paper.

Keywords: Environmentally friendly society, environmental and social studies education, collaborative curriculum and environmental problems.

INTRODUCTION

Environment is as old as man himself. It has been in existence before the creation of the first man and woman on earth. The environment constitutes both God and man-made endowments. It is an undisputable fact that environment influences man and man also influences it. This implies that man needs a conducive atmosphere to carry out his cultural social, economic and political activities. However, negative attitude of man towards environment raises a lot of concern. It follows therefore, that man needs effective education to be able to shun activities that are capable of rendering the environment unconducive and unproductive for the developmental processes of the society through both formal and informal

procedures. The inevitability of education in this crusade/process has been propagated by Ngada (2008) that "there is no doubt that the socio-economic and political development of any given society depends on the awareness of its citizens, which again is determined by their level of education". Thus, creation of awareness is therefore the basis of the concept "Environmental Education" and the meeting point between this subject area and Social Studies as a curriculum package that helps man to be aware of his both physical and social environment. Social Studies is interested in creating awareness on the danger of unconducive environment and the need to conserve natural resources and the rational use of these gifts of nature for the betterment of the society. Hence, its central focus is human development.

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Environmental-friendly society

First and foremost, environment is connected with the natural condition in which people, animal and plants live. It means everything that is around or near something. (Horby, 2006). Environmental friendly society therefore, simply refers to the society that is aware of the need to protect its environment by not harming or contaminating its surrounding. It is a law abiding society that keeps its environment clean and safe at all time for national development. In this society, people do not spit, urinate, defecate, dump refuse, etc. anywhere.

Environmental Education

This deals with man in relationship within natural and man-made population that is aware of and concerned about the environment and its associated problems and which has the knowledge, skills, attitudes motivation and commitment to work individually and collectively towards solution of current problems and the prevention of new ones. (Muhammad, 2007). Environmental Education According to Ndazagha (1999) is the process through which man is enlightened about problems in his surrounding". From the above explanation, environmental education is perceived as a course of instruction that deals with the inculcation knowledge, skills and desirable values into the students to create necessary awareness on the condition needed for quality surrounding. It entails practices in decision making and formulation of a code of behaviour concerning environmental quality. Thus, it equips man with relevant tools for taking decision towards solving the problems in his surroundings.

Objectives of Environmental Education

In an attempt to agitate for a curriculum rooted environmental education, Bozimo and Ikwumelu (1999) identified the following objectives:-

- To provide the students opportunity for recognizing environmental problems.
- To develop in the pupils a basic understanding of the dimension of the problems.
- To identify the causes and consequences of ecological disasters.
- To provide the students with the opportunity to do something themselves about improving the environment.

From the objectives highlighted above, one could say that environmental education is aimed at providing every person or students with the opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to protect and improve their surroundings. Through such education, the behavioural pattern of the people towards their environment will change for the better. Moreover, educat-

ing the citizenry on the importance of clean and safe environment will lead to positive manipulation of both natural and man-made resources for national development. Besides, Federal Government of Nigeria places a significance emphasis on environmental issues. This is demonstrated by the adoption of last Saturday of the month as "Environmental Sanitation Day" in the past and the establishment and enforcement of forestry laws and several awareness through the media. However, Abdulla (1992) observes with dismay that despite the efforts of the government, it is surprising to notice a distinct link of an emphasis on environmental education in the Nigerian school curriculum. In essence, Abdulla is agitating for environmental education as a "Curriculum Content".

Man and his Environment

The environment of man comprises of physical and social phenomenon and events. The physical environment constitutes both natural and man-made resources such as highlands, lowland, rivers, lakes, stars, moon, trees, climatic conditions like rain, sun, cold, air, wind, and all things that are created by God. While roads, houses, towns, bridges, factories, etc. are man-made physical environment. The social aspect of environment connotes other activities that man engages in to bring comfort and relief to himself. For example, government, marriage, market, music, festivals, sports, etc. are created to develop and achieve man's potentials.

Natural environment, to a greater extent has influence on man and vice versa. Where man lives, the kind of houses he builds, the kind of clothes he wears and his behaviour are dictated by his environment. Man in his wisdom has also put the natural environment into use by creating or building roads, house, town, factories, schools, hospitals, furniture and many other things we can see today. All these are made possible through the application of scientific knowledge otherwise known as "technology" The Nigerian environment is reach with God's endowed human and natural resources comprising of crops such as yam, maize, rubber, millet, and other material deposits like coal, tin, columbite, salt and petroleum. However, the attitudes of Nigerias towards protection and coservation of our environment raises a lot of concern.

Some of the Environmental Problems in Nigeria

These are some of the observable environmental problems resulting from man's constant interaction with their surrounding either through economic activities or domestically associated engagement.

a. Deforestation. This refers to gradual loss of forces in rural tropical areas for Commercial activities and domes-

tic purposes

b. Flooding and erosion as a result of blockage of water ways and lack of effective drainage system is noticeable in most of the Nigerian towns and cities. This has claimed many lives and properties of the Nigerian population

c. Indiscriminate dumping of refuse in residential areas.

d. Industrial pollution arising from production of both raw-materials and finished products. Other areas of pollution are water, air and land.

e. Bush burning activities arising from hunting for animals and farmers's preparation for the next season farming activities. The implication of this is Deplision of oxonlayer

f. Oil spillage as a result of oil exploration in oil producing regions of Nigeria.

All the aforementioned have negative effects on man either directly or otherwise. For instance, Nigerian government has spent a lot of money most especially at the oil producing areas of south-south region where vandalization of government properties, abduction of oil workers and killing of security men are on the high increase as a response to oil spillage that renders their farmland unproductive for farming activities. In line with this, Bozimo and Ikwumelu (1999) observed that government agencies have engaged in tree planting campaign, free supply of nursery plants used for checking erosions, and various forms of environmental sanitation. In spite of this attempt, it is saddened that environmental condition in Nigeria still falls short of the standard of a modern society. In order to achieve environmental friendly society, a society that sees correlation between a clean environment and socio-economic and political development, there is therefore need for collaborative environmental education to re-awaken the minds of the Nigerian citizen and ensure sustainable safety environmental condition.

Social Studies and Environmental Education

Social Studies essentially represents an interdisciplinary approach to the curriculum regarding the study of man with reference to their physical and social environments. More emphatically, it underscores the preparation and mobilization of learners for effective citizenship and national productivity. "Okam (2002) viewed the role of social studies as building citizens who are expected to positively explore opportunities to develop their own potentialities and to contribute their maximum efforts to an improvement of group living within the society". Social Studies as a socializer of the societal network have a role to play in the crusade against environmental related problems. It provides the learners with the skills to recognize environmental problems, causes and consequences and proffer solution. In view of this, Lawton and Dufour in Bozimo and Ikwemelu (1999) declares that it is difficult to draw a line between environ-

mental education and Social Studies. They discussed further that:

It is probably a matter of emphasis more than clear theoretical differences whereas an environmental studies approach might begin with the local environment and might stress geographical, physical and scientific aspect of the environment. Social Studies approach would stress the social aspect of a child's environment, especially the groups that he belongs.

The above submission has a far reaching implication. It stresses the fact that the issue of environmental management goes beyond scientific principles and theories. It accommodates desirable human behaviour or attitudes towards environment. This therefore explains the significant role Social Studies is set to play in creating the necessary awareness classroom wise among the young generations in the Nigerian schools. Hence, the scientific approach is meaningless without positive human behaviour. Supporting this thought pattern, Abdulla (1992) laments that:

We must admit that not all our science teachers possess the skills, nor are aware of the methodologies needed to present environmental science concept to students on inter-disciplinary bases. Further, not all the teachers char ged with the responsibilities of making the students aware of environmental issues are science teachers (.p171).

It is clear from the above, environmental education deserves and inter-disciplinary approach and this inter-disciplinary approach is inbuilt in social studies education as a distinguished curriculum package. The philosophy behind teaching of this subject area is the production of effective citizens who are ready to make contributions to national development in all its ramifications. In this process, Social Studies uses inbuilt mechanism or strategies for inculcating skills and desirable attitudes required to build the culture of environmental sanitation in the learners. Some of these strategies are: discussion method, panel discussion technique, dramatization technique, playway technique, field-trips, inquiry techniques, etc. which are relevant means of tackling environmental issues. Social Studies deals with man as he interacts with his socio-physical environment.

Aspects of Social Studies that promote environmental Education

Social Studies Education Curriculum is designed to enrich the students' understanding of societal problems and do something positive about it. That is why the curriculum of this subject area is interdisciplinary in nature- drawing its contents from diverse disciplines to proffer solution to various degrees of human problems through critical thinking approach. Thus, the central focus of Social Studies Education is "man and Environment". At this juncture, it is pertinent to state that the perception of

Social Studies of the word “environment” is broader. No wonder therefore, that at both primary and secondary levels of the Nigerian educational system, considerations are given to topics like man’s encounter with other men in and outside his immediate environment, encounter with nature and other man-made elements in the society, physical and social environment, cultural pattern, science and technology and its effects on man and his environment, national economic life, People and government, Our values, Citizenship, National Consciousness and National Identity, National resources, Human Rights and Rule of Law, Civic Duties, responsibilities and Obligations of Citizens and Nigerian Constitution, leadership and followership among others. All this core topics are taught to cover three aspects of learning development in cognitive, affective and psychomotor.

Moreover, Social studies is “value-oriented subject” and can therefore be tailored towards the realization of values that are inherent in environmental education. It could do this through the inculcation of right types of attitudes and values which Kazi (2004) perceived as “standards that guide a person’s judgment and behaviour in a community or society” such as sense of appreciating the beauty of both natural endowment and man-made activities, tolerance, co-operation, obedience, responsibility and patriotism among other social values into the young ones as well as the preservation of the environment for overall development of the society. Some of the social practices such as dumping of refuses, cutting down of tree, artificial environmental pollution, and others can be preached against in social studies class. Social Studies and environmental education are multi-disciplinary in nature whose purpose is geared towards the quality of life for mankind. Each of them does not only represent a broad field that encompasses much more than the subject matter of a single subject discipline but respectively constitutes applied area of knowledge which selects facts, concepts, theories and generalization for the purpose of bringing solution to human problems. Thus, the strong point behind any course of instruction in social studies is the production of efficient and effective citizens who are capable of using knowledge from diverse disciplines in making positive decision about their environment. Moreover, it is this “socio-civic” nature of this course of study that makes it plausible to be used as an instrument per excellence to create awareness through a carefully planned course of instruction on environmental issues among the young stars of the Nigerian society.

Collaborative Approach as a Solution to Environmental Problems

If Nigeria expects a productive result in her struggle to build an environmental-friendly society, there is need for

collaborative approach (curriculum wise). As it has earlier on been stated, the environmental issues are beyond the limit of scientific theories. It deserves a collaborative curriculum approach, hence the need for the development of environmental education as a curriculum design and the strength of social studies education to accommodate some environmental matters beyond the present practice. In this context, the schools have roles to play by ensuring that this subject area is handled the competent specialists so that the subject will not become a misplaced priority in the school system. Manheim in Margret (2001) maintained that the school of the past was a training ground for initiative adjustment to an established society. If this is so, then new knowledge on environmental problems, issues, insight and concern must be brought into curriculum independently like other subjects in order to engender behavioural change for mutual coexistence with our environment most especially now that the country is vigorously pursuing Millennium Development Goals and Vision 2020 objectives.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Social Studies and environmental education appears to be two separate disciplines but in socio-civic functions, they have meeting point and that is the progressive improvement of mankind through the creation of enabling conditions for man to operate. Social Studies teachers are therefore encouraged to create necessary awareness among the students on the danger of unclean and unsafe environment condition. In order to reduce environment problems to the barest minimum if not totally eradicated, the following recommendations are therefore put forward:

1. Environmental education curriculum should be developed and be taught at both primary and secondary levels of our educational system.
2. Social studies education should be enriched through a curriculum review to incorporate more environmental issues.
3. The missing link of social studies at the senior secondary school should be bridged as against being only taught at the junior level of the cadre of educational system to enable it perform its functions efficiently and effectively.

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