Research Article

Strengthening Social Cohesion, Conflict Management, and Diversity Education through the Implementation of Social Studies Education

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Abstract. Social cohesion, conflict management and diversity education are essential components that should be included in any educational curriculum that is designed to cater for multifaceted societies. The Social Studies curriculum that is included in the National Certificate of Education (NCE) in Nigeria is designed to meet these components. On the other hand, the effectiveness of the curriculum in terms of achieving these goals has been the subject of many discussions. For the purpose of determining whether or not the curriculum is efficient in fostering abilities related to social cohesion, conflict management, and diversity, a survey was carried out among students studying Social Studies in Colleges of Education in North-West Nigeria. A comprehensive analysis of the National Certificate in Education (NCE) Social Studies curriculum in Nigeria is presented here, focusing on both its strengths and areas that could use some work. As part of the evaluation process, the effectiveness of the curriculum in developing skills related to social cohesion, conflict management, and diversity is

assessed. A number of suggestions are offered in order to improve the curriculum and better prepare future educators for the multifaceted society that exists in Nigeria. According to the findings of the study, there is a pressing need for a more direct emphasis on conflict management skills, negotiation skills, and an appreciation for diversity.

Keywords: NCE Social Studies Curriculum, Social Cohesion, Conflict Management, Diversity Education, Curriculum Enhancement

INTRODUCTION

The global community is becoming more intertwined, and our choices, viewpoints, and principles have repercussions on others. Prejudice towards different tribes, apprehension towards other religions, discrimination, and a diminishing sense of community are instances of societal conflicts that indicate the necessity to reflect on the need to build a more socially cohesive society. Creating a peaceful, just, and united society has consequences for all individuals. Human interactions are inextricably linked with conflict. Conflict management skills should be a prerequisite for NCE Social Studies students in order to foster social cohesion, as it is widely recognized that no community or society is free from conflict. However, a cursory examination of the NCE social studies minimum standards for Colleges of Education over the years has revealed that there is still much to be desired. Only three (3) courses in the NCE social studies programme are designed to equip prospective educators with the necessary skills to moderate conflict and foster social unity. This demonstrates that the Social Studies students are not adequately prepared for social cohesion and conflict management.

The objective of Social Studies education, which is a functional and qualitative curriculum design in all primary, secondary, and teacher training colleges in Nigeria, is to cultivate a competent, humane, and effective citizenry that can make a positive impact on society. This is achieved through the acquisition of positive knowledge, attitudes, values, and adaptive interactive skills (NPE 2014). The Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) Social Studies curriculum teaches students to research, analyze, and explain human interactions with the environment. Nigeria's NCE Social Studies curriculum prepares future teachers to confront social issues and foster national unity. The curriculum's success in accomplishing these goals is not without hurdles. The goal of this study is to evaluate the curriculum's effectiveness in fostering social cohesiveness, conflict management, and diversity skills, and make recommendations for improvement.

CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS
NCE Social Studies Curriculum

Teachers are a key component of any education system, and quality teaching is a pre-requisite for success (Barber & Mourshed 2007; World Bank 2012). However, teacher quality is often defined and reduced to student performance in national tests and closely linked to a human capital understanding of education's role in economic

growth (Naylor& Sayed 2014). While the economy is important, we should not underestimate both the need for and the role of education and teachers in promoting peace, building social cohesion and promoting nation-building and national identity inside and outside the classroom (Novelli 2016). This issue is particularly pertinent at a time when global inequality levels are at historic highs (Piketty 2014), and where violent conflict, wars and terrorist violence are widespread.

SOCIAL COHESION

Social cohesion refers to the bonds and relationships that bring people together in society. It involves creating a sense of belonging, promoting trust, and fostering positive interactions between individuals and groups. A socially cohesive society is one where all groups have a sense of belonging, participation, inclusion, recognition and legitimacy. Pervaiz, Chaudhary& van Staveren (2013), define social cohesion as "a phenomenon of togetherness which may work to keep the society united and harmonized." Dragolov, Ignácz, Lorenz, Delhey and Boehnke (2013b) refer to it as the "manifestation of an intact society, marked by solidarity and helpfulness, and by a kind of team spirit. It is a desirable quality that makes a society livable and sustainable." However, others argue for a definition of social cohesion that both highlights the capacity of a society to pursue its members' welfare while at the same time reducing inequalities and promoting inclusion amongst diverse groups (Council of Europe, 2005). Promoting social cohesion is important for maintaining a stable and harmonious society. It helps reduce conflicts, build resilience, and enables people to work together towards common goals. Diversity education and conflict management are key aspects of fostering social cohesion.

CONFLICT AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Life is full of conflict; it happens spontaneously during our regular routines. Individual and/or group opinions will always differ from one another. A fundamental aspect of human existence, conflict can affect our decisions or behavior in one or another manner. It should be seen as a chance for learning and development that might lead to favorable effects rather than as an activity that invariably produces negative ones. Effective conflict management and resolution will help us to produce favorable results (Evans, 2013).

Conflict has a potential to create positive opportunities and advancement towards a common goal, however, conflict can also devastate relationships and lead to negative outcomes (Kazimoto, 2013; Fisher, 2000; Evans, 2013).Conflict management involves the process of limiting the negative aspects of conflict while increasing the positive aspects of conflict. The goal is to enhance learning and group outcomes, including effectiveness or performance in organizational setting. Conflict management reduces bad results and increases favorable ones. Effectively managed conflicts can lead to positive outcomes and productivity for the team and/or organization (Loehr, 2017b). Conflict management reduces negative consequences and increases positive ones. Thomas and Kilman, (2007) identified five conflict management styles: competitive; collaborative; compromising; avoiding; and accommodating.

Effective conflict management strategies include:
* Identifying the root causes of conflict
* Improving communication between parties
* Fostering empathy and understanding
* Finding common ground and shared interests
* Developing win-win solutions
* Establishing fair and transparent processes for resolving disputes

Teaching conflict management skills is an important aspect of social studies education for promoting peaceful coexistence in diverse societies.

DIVERSITY EDUCATION

Diversity education refers to teaching about different cultures, ethnicities, races, socioeconomic classes, sexual orientations, abilities, ages and religions. Efforts and activities aiming at raising awareness, knowledge, and appreciation of many ethnic, racial, and social backgrounds define diversity education. Diversity education aims to equip people to operate and live in a multicultural environment, therefore advancing social justice and lowering discriminations. Moreover, teaching about how biases operate can open the door to educating students about ways to prevent acting on their biases (Casad et al., 2013). According to Monteith et al. (2019), providing students with the necessary tools to comprehend and tackle social justice inequalities enhances their general proficiency in recognizing and resolving their own and others' biases. Engaging with these subjects leads to enhanced transparency and comprehension, and enhances students' ability to navigate and appreciate diverse cultures (Morris & Ashburn-Nardo, 2010). Key components of diversity education include:
* Developing cultural awareness and sensitivity
* Challenging stereotypes and biases
* Promoting inclusive practices and policies
* Celebrating differences while finding common ground
* Giving voice to marginalized groups
* Addressing issues of equity, access and social justice

Diversity education is crucial for preparing students to navigate an increasingly diverse and interconnected world. It helps build the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for effective cross-cultural communication and collaboration.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To assess the strengths and areas for improvement in the NCE Social Studies curriculum in Nigeria.
2. To evaluate the curriculum's effectiveness in developing skills related to social cohesion, conflict management, and diversity.
3. To identify the key values that the curriculum should reinforce to address the erosion of essential societal values.
4. To provide recommendations for enhancing the NCE Social Studies curriculum to better prepare future teachers for Nigeria's diverse society.

RESEARCH METHODS

A survey was conducted among Social Studies students in Colleges of Education in North West Nigeria. The survey instrument consisted of 10 items measuring various aspects of the NCE Social Studies curriculum, including its focus on social cohesion, conflict management, and diversity, as well as its effectiveness in developing critical thinking, communication skills, and tolerance. The survey used a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree. "A total of 300 students participated in the survey, with representation from various regions and ethnic groups in Nigeria. The survey data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Summary of Means and Standard Deviations on Perception of Students on the Adequacy of the NCE Social Studies Contents in Promoting Social Cohesion and Conflict Management

No	Items	Mean	
1	More focus should be given to developing social cohesion, conflict management, and diversity in the NCE social studies curriculum	3.82	0.389
2	flexibility, rational criticism, and independence are fast eroding in our society	3.21	0.479
3	I think the NCE Social Studies curriculum effectively addresses issues of conflict management among students in my College of Education	3.87	0.351
4	I think the social studies contents at the NCE level are adequate in developing critical thinking and personal self-reflection	3.48	0.803
5	Social studies contents at the NCE level do not prepare the teacher for the cultural diversity and religious plurality found in Nigerian society	2.16	1.050
6	A constant review of the NCE social studies content is necessary to keep abreast with the changing world order	3.40	0.962
7	I think the courses outlined in the NCE social studies minimum standards as electives should be changed to core courses due to their relevance to the changing times	3.21	0.500
8.	The teaching methods used in my classes help me develop skills related to social cohesion and conflict management (e.g., critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, empathy)	2.64	0.692
9.	My interaction with the contents of social studies at this level has made me more tolerant, open to dialogue, and constructive criticisms	2.62	0.688
10.	More issues of social cohesion and conflict management should be added to the contents of social studies at the NCE level	3.19	0.556
Aggregate Mean: 3.16			

The data summarizes the perceptions of students on the adequacy of the National Certificate in Education (NCE) Social Studies contents in promoting social cohesion and conflict management. Here's a detailed explanation of the results:

1. High Agreement on Curriculum Focus (Mean = 3.82): Students believe that more emphasis should be placed on developing social cohesion, conflict management, and diversity within the NCE Social Studies curriculum. This suggests recognition of the importance of these areas. Addressing identified omissions will further

strengthen the curriculum's impact, making it an even more powerful tool for shaping responsible, respectful, and cooperative citizens in the context of a diverse and united nation (Achieng-Evensen, 2016).

2. Erosion of Values (Mean = 3.21): There is a moderate agreement that societal values such as cooperation, mutual respect, individual creativity, flexibility, rational criticism, and independence are eroding. This indicates a concern among students about the current state of these values in society. According to Ganira et al. (2018), social studies curriculum content plays a pivotal role in helping students develop respect as a social value crucial for in-class interactions and productive citizenship. Relevant interactions foster awareness, values, and behavioral expectations, allowing learners to develop the necessary social skills for survival in the real world and social cohesiveness. . Morris (2017) also agrees that respectful students contribute to positive interactions by being kind, avoiding hurtful comments, and upholding standards of decency for societal existence.

3. Effective Curriculum for Conflict Management (Mean = 3.87): Students generally agree that the current NCE Social Studies curriculum effectively addresses conflict management among students. This suggests that the curriculum has strengths in this area. The deliberate focus on collaboration, interpersonal relationships, and the inclusion of essential components ensures that the curriculum plays a pivotal role in fostering social cohesion and address issues of conflict and diversity management.

4. Critical Thinking and Self-Reflection (Mean = 3.48): There is moderate agreement that the NCE Social Studies contents are adequate in developing critical thinking and personal self-reflection. This indicates a positive perception of the curriculum's impact on these skills. Viberg et al. (2022) argue that learners with appropriate social orientations about their neighborhood develop sensitivity, cultural awareness, values, and behavioral dispositions for effective citizenship. These citizens not only exhibit qualities of dependability, accountability, reliability, and trustworthiness but also demonstrate a consciousness of human dignity.

5. Preparation for Cultural Diversity (Mean = 2.16): Students disagree that the NCE Social Studies contents adequately prepare teachers for cultural diversity and religious plurality in Nigeria. This finding gives credence to Ross (2020), who opined that the content of the Social Studies curriculum highlights the importance of people living alongside one another, possessing a common origin, abilities to communicate, and environment. Gamage et al. (2021) assert the critical importance of the relevance of social studies curriculum content in fostering a sense of belonging among learners to their family, community, and country.

6. Need for Curriculum Review (Mean = 3.40): Students agree that the NCE Social Studies curriculum requires constant review to remain relevant in a changing world. This point to the necessity for ongoing curriculum updates. The attention to areas in the curriculum, notably citizenship education (Akala, 2021 and the explicit coverage of how people can live together in peace and harmony is a

notable gap. Addressing these is crucial for a more comprehensive and effective Social Studies curriculum that fully aligns with the goals of promoting national cohesion and integration (Ross, 2020). To meet the aspiration of Nigerians and Nigeria, especially in this era of global economic competitiveness and values re-orientation, the educational curriculum need to be revised to reflect and accommodate societal issues that are emerging on a daily basis (Kolo, 2007; Mbachu, 2011 & Okoro and Afurobi, 2011).

7. Elective Courses to Core (Mean = 3.21): There is a moderate agreement that some elective courses in the NCE Social Studies curriculum should be made core due to their relevance. This reflects recognition of the changing educational needs. . Twining et al. (2021) support this perspective, suggesting that developers of social studies curricula should organize content in ways that support learners in developing these crucial social values. When implemented effectively, this content contributes to the growth of citizens who are not only dependable, accountable, reliable, and trustworthy but also conscious of human dignity.

8. Teaching Methods (Mean = 2.64): Students have a mixed perception of the effectiveness of teaching methods in developing skills related to social cohesion and conflict management. This suggests that teaching methods could be improved to better support these skills. The teaching and learning of social studies has hinged on the pillar that social studies, of all other school subjects, assume the major responsibility for decision-making on issues and problems arising from all encounters of human life in the environment. Mezieobi (2013) noted that the malfunction implementation of social studies curriculum manifest among other things in the teachers' reliance on the didactic or expository instructional methods to the exclusion of the contemplative, reflective and creative methods germane to effective social studies implementation. Mezieobi and Mezieobi (2008) asserted that instructional innovation has received little or no attention in Nigerian social studies classroom. Mezieobi (2013) attest to the fact that a lean percentage (about 5%) of social studies teachers utilizes the critical-thinking generating methods which are desired in effective social studies teaching-learning setting.

9. Tolerance and Open Dialogue (Mean = 2.62): Students have a mixed view on whether their interaction with the NCE Social Studies content has made them more tolerant and open to dialogue. This indicates room for improvement in these areas. Recognizing this, it becomes apparent that social studies curriculum content should be more relevant to students' interactions, with a focus on respect as a crucial life skill for navigating home, school, and society. Risinger (2012) found that the social studies curriculum had not been effectively utilized to equip students with the necessary abilities to foster respect as a positive value. Ghazi (2018) acknowledges that challenges in teaching respect as a value in social studies stem from curriculum content and implementation, teacher expertise, class size, task time allocation, and school regulations. In response, educators must create an environment that encourages respectful exchange of ideas, active listening, and an appreciation for diversity (Ganira et al., 2018).

10. Inclusion of Social Cohesion and Conflict Management Topics (Mean = 3.19): Students agree that more topics on social cohesion and conflict management should be added to the curriculum. This suggests a demand for more comprehensive coverage of these issues. Aggregate Mean (3.16): The overall average mean score of 3.16 indicates that, on average, students perceive the NCE Social Studies contents to be moderately adequate in promoting social cohesion and conflict management. However, the specific areas of improvement highlighted by the lower mean scores (Items 5, 8, and 9) suggest that there are critical aspects of the curriculum that need enhancement to better prepare teachers and students for the diverse and complex society they are part of.

CONCLUSION

Conclusively, the NCE Social Studies curriculum has strengths in effective conflict management, critical thinking, and self-reflection among students. However, there is room for improvement in areas such as social cohesion, diversity, and addressing eroding values. The curriculum should focus on building inclusive communities, managing diversity, and promoting social harmony. It should also address cultural and religious diversity, develop relevant skills like critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and empathy, and promote tolerance and open dialogue. The curriculum should also expand content to address social cohesion and conflict management, ensuring future teachers are equipped to address these critical aspects of education and society. By addressing these areas, the curriculum can better prepare future teachers to navigate Nigeria's complex social landscape and contribute to the development of a more cohesive, conflict-resilient, and values-driven society.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen the NCE Social Studies curriculum in Nigeria:

1. Enhance Curriculum Content by incorporating more topics related to social cohesion, conflict management, and diversity into the core curriculum.
2. Improve Teaching Methods and Pedagogical Approaches by providing training and support for departments to enhance their skills in using interactive, student-centered teaching methods. Encourage the use of case studies, role-playing exercises, and group discussions to foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills.
3. Expand Conflict Resolution Content by incorporating more content on conflict resolution, mediation, and negotiation skills to equip teachers with the necessary competencies to manage social tensions. Ensure Curriculum Responsiveness ensure that the curriculum remains responsive to emerging social issues and challenges faced by Nigerian communities.

By implementing these recommendations, the NCE Social Studies curriculum can be strengthened to better prepare future teachers for the realities of Nigeria's diverse society and to foster the values and skills necessary for promoting social cohesion, conflict management, and tolerance

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