

## Curriculum Response to Social Problems in Nigeria

**Oyeleke Oluniyi**

Centre for Distance Learning  
Obafemi Awolowo University  
Ile-Ife, Nigeria

**Aluko, Olugbenga Kehinde**

Osun State College of Education  
Ilesa, Nigeria

### Abstract

*The paper focuses on the effectiveness of the response of the Federal Government of Nigeria towards social problem through innovation in the Social Studies Curriculum for junior secondary schools. The primary aim of the innovation is to address the rising tide of social problems using school as a viable option. One hundred and twenty social studies teachers were used as the study sample and questionnaire were designed to elicit information on the relevance of the new curriculum in achieving the intended objectives.*

*The findings of the study show that the respondents portray a positive relationship between the new social studies curriculum and social problems in Nigeria, taking into cognizance the use of meta-cognition methods of teaching in the classroom. In conclusion, the author critically analyse the effectiveness of the curriculum bearing mind the recipient of the curriculum package and the prevailing societal norms among the policy makers in the society.*

**Key Words:** Social Problems, Curriculum Innovation, Perception

### **Background to the Study**

The federal government of Nigeria recognizes the daunting task confronting Nigeria as far as social vices are concerned. The poverty rate is alarming. Virtually, in every segment of the society, corrupt practices seem to be the norms. Politicians primarily perceive political participation as a means of persona enrichment (Adebayo 1986; Iroanusi, 2006;, Ijalaye 2009). Philips (1993) observed that prostitution as a vice has acquired some degree of respectability like other fastening social problems troubling collective sensibilities of Nigerian state.

In an attempt to find lasting solutions to myriads of social problems in the country, Obasanjo administration (1999-2007) put a committee to look into the school curriculum with a view to solving some of the problems and also towards achieving the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals (MGDs) policy initiatives. One of the major outcomes of the committee was changes in Social Studies curriculum. The innovation carried out was both organizational and pedagogical in nature. In compliance with the Universal Basic Education, the curriculum scope covers primary one to junior secondary school using a spiral model of curriculum design.

6-3-3-4 technically became 9-3-4 - nine years of compulsory primary and junior secondary school education, three years of senior school and four years of tertiary education as against the initial practice of six years of primary school, three years of junior secondary school, three years in senior secondary school, and four years tertiary education. Apart from this structural changes, there were fundamental restructuring in the content. Topics such as Women Trafficking, Drug Abuse, Corruption, Poverty, HIV/AIDS, were articulated into the curriculum content.

This innovation is ground taking as social problems were to be openly discussed and taught within the four walls of the classroom. It is assumed that awareness about these evils will be created through classroom teachings with attendant possibility of eliminating social problems. According to the new curriculum package, the overall objectives of Social Studies at the Basic Education level are to;

- develop the ability of the learners to adapt to his or her changing environment;
- become responsible and disciplined individuals capable and willing to contribute to the development of their societies;
- inculcate the right types of values into the learners;
- develop a sense of comprehension towards other people, their diverse cultures, history and those fundamental things that make them human;
- develop the capacity to recognize the many dimensions of being human in different cultural and social contexts;
- develop a sense of solidarity and sharing based on a sense of security and one's own identity.

The curriculum focuses on various themes from junior secondary school I to III. The themes include the following;

### **Junior Secondary Social Studies Curriculum**

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Topics</i>
J.S. 1	Introduction to Social Studies; People and their Environment; Socialization; Its Agents and Processes; Culture; Social issues and problems; National Unity and Integration.
J.S. 2	People and their Environment; Culture; Social Issues and problems; Science and Technology; Communication; Family I; Family II; School Community; Social issues and problems; Storage; National Economy; Health Issues
J.S. 3	Social Value; Peace and Conflicts; National Economy; National Economic Life; Science and Technology; World Issues

Source: Nigerian Educational and Research Development Council, 2007

### ***Theoretical Background***

Social Studies curriculum is unique because of its various adaptive roles and its functionality. Objectives differ across national boundaries and even among differing localities within nation state. Kssoick (1981) identified differs objectives of social studies across national boundaries. These objectives are epistemologically related, but distinctive targeted focus. Nigeria experience has shown that objectives change over time and this has inspired innovation from time to time. Ehindero (1986) recognized this distinctiveness and argued for criteria for curriculum content selection approach that is different from western criteria for curriculum selection.

His argument is rooted on the ground that challenges defer between developing and non-developed countries. Ehindero (1996) therefore propounded a Categories of Human Survival Encounter putting into cognizance the peculiar nature of African challenges. These human encounters and experiences revolve on issues affecting generality of masses in society with specific reference to Nigeria. Such problems are threatening to human survival and they include hunger, famine, corruption, poverty, illiteracy, population pressure, ineffective leadership and critical followership, poor service delivery, injustice, discrimination, and so on.

Ehindero noted that those challenges could be social, political and could revolve around growth in individual capacities, ethical decision and choice, ability to deal with ecological and environmental factors, growth in democratic and social participation. While recognizing the theoretical construct of Hrist (1974), Phenix (1964), and Wheeler (1975); their criteria for content selection apply very well to their respective developed societies, where as Nigeria citizens confronts slightly different category of survival problems.

The central idea of Categories of Human Survival Encounters revolves around the peculiar nature of the society and problems or challenges confronting such a society and as such, those generally accepted situations can be strategically selected to constitute the fundamental bedrock of curriculum content in the school. The utility conception and relative flexibility of social studies puts it in a vantage position to be used as a curriculum framework to inspire desirable social changes. Specifically in Nigeria, the challenges of social problems such as corruption, electoral malpractices, examination malpractices, cultism among students, drug addicts among others are subjects of Categories of Human Survival paradigm.

Related theoretical paradigms abound. Social Action Approach to curriculum content selection was widely proposed in the United States. Social Action theorists proposed that societal social problems can be the fulcrum of school curriculum with specific reference to that socio-cultural milieu. Social Efficiency movement was a variant of this theoretical inclination. The movement gained ground in the United State early 80s and mid 1990s. Theoretical focus of this movement was to develop “a generation of boys and girls who will be able to use facts and skills to meet life problems and life situations with increasing effectiveness”.

Franklin (1982) noted that, “it was herein the Social Studies... that one of the more instructive changes... of the social efficiency occurred”. Subjects introduced under the aegis of Social Efficiency include Common Learning Program which was organized around “the personal and social problems common to the young people of the school”; Modern Problem which adopted integrative approach and revolve around courses in “contemporary problems”.

### ***Literature review***

What are social problem? Do they really exist or it is just the conception or imagination of people? Marshall (1949) defines social problem as any situation, which interferes with the orderly course of life, to the extent that it requires some activity directed towards its modification. Scholar (1965) defines it as a situation affecting a significant member of the people that is believed by them and /or by significant members in the society to be a source of difficulty or unhappiness, and one that is considered to be capable of amelioration.

Nobbs et al (1987) defines it as a condition in society which is judged to be undesirable and in need of reform, or elimination by influential group of society. Kobiowu (1998) argued that, there exist many social problems in Nigeria and one social problem begets another.

He observed that social problem has become a cog in the wheel educational advancement in Nigeria. Some social problems in Nigeria are briefly discussed below.

### **Corruption**

Corruption is a recurring incident hindering meaningful development of Nigerian state. Corruption manifests in the following ways in Nigeria: Receiving material gains as an inducement to do something, obtaining money or other material gains to pervert the course of justice, falsification of records, embezzlement of money by highly placed officials both in the private and public places, giving or receiving money or other material gains to an employer by prospective employee to secure appointment even though he/she is not the most qualified applicant, giving of favour to obtain promotion thereby sacrificing efficiency and competence for favoritism (Oyeleke, 2007).

Ajibewa (2006) noted that "Corruption is Nigeria's greatest problem in its quest for sound and solid democracy." Magstadt (2009) wrote extensively about corruption in Nigeria. He highlighted various dimension of corruption in Nigeria from military dictators who have enriched themselves shamelessly while utterly neglecting the economic and social needs of the citizens, the police officers who routinely set up roadblocks collecting bribe. Base on the report of Transparency International- a Research Institute based in Berlin, Germany, Nigeria had the most corruption government in the world in the mid 1990s. For the sake of clarity, the opinion of Magstadt (2009, 133) on Nigerian state is quoted below:

Bribery and extortion have been a way of life ever since Nigeria was established as an independent state, and the system of "patronage", in which the military rulers bestow governmental jobs and other favours on supporters of the regime, has produced a bloated, inefficient, irresponsible (and unresponsive) bureaucracy that absorbs more than 80 percent of the annual budget. It is not unusual to find petty civil servants asleep at their desks or for the less somnolent, asking visitors for cash. Higher-level officials routinely inflate the contracts for everything the state resources and embezzle untold sums of money.

### **Poverty**

Poverty is a state of dispossession and deprivation in which people are denied of their income, opportunity, empowerment, dignity, decency and sensibilities. Eromosile (1993) described poverty as "a state of insecurity, death, deficiency, the condition of lacking desirable elements. Connell (1969) described various cycle of poverty. People with low income are prone to illness, limitation on mobility, limited access to education, information and training. They therefore find it difficult for their children to improve the status. The cruel legacy of poverty is passed from parents to children.

In 1998, according to the editorial comment of a tabloid in Nigeria- Nigeria Tribune, Nigeria was ranked 17<sup>th</sup> poorest country in the world, and that between 1985 and 1992, extreme poverty increased from 10 million people to 13.9 million. The top 10 percent earn more than 40 percent of the gross income, with balance of 60 percent going to 90 percent of the population. In 2007, 70 percent of Nigerians were reportedly earning equivalent of one dollar per day (Magstadt, 2009).

Street-begging among vast majority of citizens is a common phenomenon. The situation is worse off in the Northern part of the country where alms taking has become a norm. The matter is made worse by wide inequality between the rich (in most cases, past military rulers or politicians) and the poor masses. The distributive injustices place a lot of tension on the school and its curriculum as teacher often embark on strikes to press for fair income. Incessant strikes action obviously has compromised standard of education.

### **Human Trafficking**

Human trafficking and child labour assumed state of notoriety in early 2000s in Nigeria. Many Nigerians lady were trafficked to Europe notably Italy to engage in forced labour and a sex trades. Though a number of the victims were hoodwinked, some went on their own volition because of expected financial gains. In a research carried out by the Women's Health and Action Research Centre (a community based research centre in Benin, Edo state, Nigeria) on the extent of human trafficking in the city of Benin, Nigeria.

Out of 1,456 respondents who serve as sample for the study, ninety seven percent (97%) of them have heard about human trafficking, forty eight percent (48%) know somebody who is involved in the acts most of whom are their friends or relatives. Some of them went because of lack of economic means and the countries they went to include Italy, Netherlands, Spain, Germany, Belgium. Eighty percent (83%) were still there as at the year 2002, while seventeen percent (17%) have come back come back out of which 83 percent of them were deported, while the rest twenty percent (20%) came back on their volition (WARCLT, 2002).

Three cases of victim of human trafficking are stated below as reported by Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation – (WOTCLEF, 2002). Shirley is a graduate of Lagos State University. A Nigerian woman encouraged her to go to Italy for a profitable job. On getting to Italy; she was sent to work in the street as prostitute. Sandra was born in Benin. Edo State Nigeria. Her mother's friend tricked her to Italy. On getting to Italy, her travelling expenses/debt amount to 70,000,000 Italian liras. She was sent to street to prostitute her self to pay the debt.

Rose was 24years old and lived in Lagos. She made acquaintance with Loveth, who had just returned from Europe. Loveth explained better prospect of getting job in Europe. On getting to Europe, the only available job was prostitution.

**The table below shows deported Nigerians between 1999 – 2000**

Country	Number	Month	Year Deported
Italy	68	March	1999
Italy	35	Sept	1999
Italy	15	Nov	1999
Italy	85	Dec	1999
Saudi Arabia	17	March	2000
Italy	78	March	2000

**Source: (WOTCLEF, 2002)**

Other social problems include cultism which many Nigerian students have been lured into ignorantly, out of curiously or mere thirsty for power and influence; drug addicts; examination malpractices, etc.

### **Objective of the studies**

The objectives of the study are to examine the relevance of the new social studies curriculum towards finding solutions to social problems in Nigeria and investigate the effectiveness of the methods prescribed in the curriculum package.

### **Research hypothesis**

1. There is no significant relationship between the new social studies curriculum and social problems in Nigeria.
2. There is no significant relationship between the prescribed teaching methods and social problems concepts.

### **Methodology**

The study adopts a survey design in carrying out the study. A survey method was adopted to determine the relevance of the new curriculum towards amelioration of social problems, while the findings were subjected to critical analysis. The study population consist of social studies teachers in four local government areas of Osun State, Nigeria. A sample of one hundred and twenty social studies teachers were randomly selected as the study sample.

An attitudinal scale of twenty items was constructed to elicit information on the new social studies curriculum strength to tackle social problems in Nigeria. Respondents were to choose a likely correct option, using a four-point Likert--like scale. Positive item are score as strongly agree (04), agree(03), strongly disagree(01), disagree(02) while for negative items, the scores are, strongly agree (01), agree (02), disagree (03), strongly disagree (04).

The questionnaires were self-administered and were collected on the spot; except in few cases where the researcher made a revisit when concerned teachers were on school assignment.

### **Criteria for selecting the study sample**

Successful implementation of school programme rests on teachers' cooperation and effectiveness. The attitude displays by teachers towards innovation varies across personalities, orientation and teachers' inputs at various stages of curriculum implementation. Bushnell (1971) recalled various reasons adduced by Dr. Neal Cross on why innovation falls. Some of them centered on teachers and are reproduced here:

1. Management failure to anticipate the problems which teachers encountered.
2. Failure to modify established practices, which worked against the requirement of a flexible schedule and multiple curriculum options.
3. The teachers' inability to carry out their new roles through lack of understanding and inadequately developed skills.
4. Growing frustration of the teacher following their initial enthusiasm as they become aware of their inability to handle the situation in the prescribed manner.

The nature of innovation also affects the "teacher effect" of its implementation. In a top down approach where teachers are merely recipients of a planned change, their positive attitudinal disposition would undoubtedly be in questioned. This idea of top down approach prevails in Nigeria where policies are passed down from ministry of Education. Somehow, the phenomenon is global. Dalin (1974) observed that practicing teacher were not taking into consideration in the decision making process and in the development of strategy. However, the real desire changes depend in the teachers' effort.

For a meaningful success of innovation, Ehindero (1996) advised that the teacher should be fully involved right from the formation of objectives through the curriculum development and implementation process. In my interaction with teachers in the course of this study, a substantial number of them are ignorant about the commencement time of the implementation of the new curriculum.

While some schools have started operating the new curriculum, substantial numbers of schools within the same locality are yet to commence implementation. Degree of variance also manifested between public and private schools. Almost all private schools have commenced implementation, while those who are yet to commence fall to public school divide. Probably adoption of top-down approach to innovation is borne out of officials' perception of teachers to innovation. Ehindero (1996) noted that, contemporary innovation in Nigeria "have been principled on the belief that teachers are usually resistant, incapable or unwilling to change".

He observed further that such attitude by teacher may results from lack of opportunity to develop and articulate competences in their past and contemporary social situations. If this perception is borne out of empirical study or a mere observation is contestable. The solution is not to alienate teachers, but rather they should be given opportunities to voice their misgivings and uncertainties about the proposed innovation. Adjustment rate of teachers to innovation is another area of concern. Slow response may be attributed to their alienation in developmental process, lack of adequate resources and materials for implementation of the new programme, and lack of in -service training to keep teachers adjusted to new changes.

In the course of carrying out this study, extreme slow adjustment rate was observed. The curriculum was compiled in 2007 and expectedly, the implementation should be immediate. Surprisingly, a substantial number of schools are yet to commence implementation. Visible apathy is shown in the face of most teachers interacted with.

### ***Data analysis and findings***

The data collected were analyzed using chi-square. At 0.05 level of significant, when the df is 10, t-calculated is 22.40 while the t-table value is 18.30. The decision was to reject the hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis, supporting a positive relationship between the content of the new social studies curriculum and social problems. The item twenty of the questioner requested the respondents to give their opinion on the relevance of the curriculum towards solving social problems. Most of the responses support the statistical findings. The generality of the opinion is the effectiveness of the new curriculum. Some of their responses are stated below:

"If properly implemented, it will go a long way in rebranding Nigeria"

"The curriculum entails the syllabus that addresses the social problems and how they could be solved. Therefore in explaining the problems and the solutions to these problems pupils/students are taught how to avoid these social vices"

However, there are few seemingly discordant tunes. Their observation focus on the methodology adopted, stressing the use of traditional methodology adopted in the old curriculum. In their opinion, there should be a review of methods, availability of enough materials especially relevant textbooks. I share the same point of view in this respect. Textbook, teaching aids, documentaries on the victims of social disorder, and so on should be provided. Social problem is not solved if all teachers have to do is to define certain concepts, give examples and suggest possible ways such problems could be solved. This is limited to creating awareness. Education is beyond creation of awareness; it is a behavioral changes emanated from new experience.

### ***Instructional implication***

The use of traditional methodology in teaching and learning process is greatly doubtful if the desired objectives of the innovation are to be achieved.

Aside concern on methodology, the mode of assessment which is purely paper and biro based is deficient when juxtaposed with the objectives of the innovation.. In the place of traditional discussion method, I wish to suggest a more pragmatic learning method that will aid learning, retention and internalization of positive ideals, and equip the learners' advocacy skills among their peers and in the general society. Teacher should rise to the challenge or the demand of the innovation by adopt a Meta cognitive teaching approach in the classroom.

Content innovation should be backed up with methodological innovation that allows for brainstorming on the part of learners. Curriculum content should adopt a flexible model that is progressive and accommodate emerging challenges. The prepared content is not an end in itself, but rather provides a bulwark that provides clarity, focus and direction for further discoveries as learners actively engage in the teaching and learning process. Students are provided opportunity for rational thinking, problem-solving, advocacy and analysis skills.

### ***Concluding Remarks***

Education performs manifest and latent functions. From functionalist perspective, school transmits cultural values, promotes social and political integration, maintains social control and acts as agent of change. School as agent of change ensures societal and personal transformation and curriculum both hidden and official, is the catalyst of such change. The interactionist view of school also supports harmony between culture and the society. Interaction between teachers and learners in school community inspire positive changes in the learners. Students normally respond to the teachers' expectation of their students.

This modeling effect stimulates personality transformation. Teachers' perception of students had profound influence on the learners. In cases when teachers expect an excellent performance, there is significant and exceptional improvement in students' performance. From conflict perspective, the dominant group will always perpetuate their interest even if it is not shared by the oppressed majority. School is expectedly to serve as agent of social reformation and could be used to encourage 'innovation in the material and technology sphere. The reference case was post revolutionary Russia where schools were given the task of destroying the old bourgeois values and creating new values appropriate to a socialist society.

The persuasion is that the promotion of desirable change and transformation of students will have a positive effect on the larger society (Kobiowu, 1994; Schaefer, 2004; Ogunniyi, 2009). This partly influences the curriculum innovation in social studies in Nigeria. However, can school rise above the problem in the locality where it is situated as in the case of social problem in Nigeria? For example, a case of corruption that is deep seated in the top echelon of leadership, can it be eliminated through curriculum innovation? Can the school be affectively used as an agent of change if the curriculum objectives conflict with values hold by her corrupt leaders in governance?

Would there be need for curriculum innovation if the instrument of law is effectively used to enforce compliances to the country's legal system? Demographic factors suggest that the school- age citizens who are out of school are more likely to engage in social problems than children who attend school. They have the higher degree or propensities to engage in chronic social problems and are vulnerable to the traffickers and other predators. What relevant curriculum has with such a large percentage of children who are out of school? It is reported that about million school-age children are out of school in Nigeria!

Admittedly, School performs functions earlier discussed above, dimension of changes are usually the dominant values held by the society either through consensus as in democratic societies that seek to inculcate democratic values into the citizens, or by authoritarian regime through the use of force as in military regime or other anti democratic governments. In the case of communist Russia and other communist societies which are always cited as examples, the school effort is backed and reinforced by dominant values of regime in government - Marxist –Lenin forces seek to perpetuate communist ideals in the society. In the absence of such complementarities between the state and the school, school effort will amount to a situation where military government professing inculcation of democratic values through school.

The institutional and operational framework of military will work contrary even when there is good intention. From another perspective, if the South African film- Sarafina's play (a play that focused on the role of students in fighting apartheid government in South Africa. Teachings in the school sparked light of radicalism and nationalism in the school children) is a reflection of the reality in apartheid South Africa, curriculum as an agent of radical transformation becomes a strong, potent force. The overriding question is what is the dominant ideology? What are the existing subculture, countercultures and norms? The functionalist, conflict and interactionist all agree that society and culture are in harmony but they are serving different purposes.

From functionalist perspective, for as long as the culture performs the societal expected roles, the social order will persist. Conflict proponents maintain that cultural traits are used to maintain sectional interest of the strong. In this case, dominant ideology will persist to serve a group interest. Who indulge in social problems in Nigeria? The leaders in authority, the school age children or the entire citizens? Acceptable and accurate answers to these questions will determine the efficacy of the curriculum intents.

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