

Culture and Moral Values for Sustainable National Development: The Role of Social Studies Education

R.O. Arisi

Department of Social Science Education
Delta State University, Abraka
Delta State, Nigeria
P.M.B 1, Abraka
E-mail: regina_arisi@yahoo.com

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Abstract

It is a fact that there is decadence of culture and moral values in the African societies, especially Nigeria. There is also high rate of neglect of indigenous societal norms, ethical values and culture to the embrace of foreign culture and values. The present system of education laden with foreign traits is the means through which foreign culture and values are transferred and there are inimical to the African culture and values. The neglect of indigenous culture and values, in preference to foreign ones, results in vices and problems in the African societies, such as armed robbery and violent crimes, terrorism, gangsterism, indecent dress code, prostitution, homosexuality and many others that hamper development in the African societies. It is against this background that this paper considers the use of social studies education as a means by which Nigeria can obtain the much needed culture and values geared towards sustainable development. In looking at how social studies can bring back the fading African culture and values as a means to sustainable development, the paper explores the example of the strategy suggested and adopted by UNESCO research of the use of education, social studies education as a means to sustainable development in Western societies and we applied the methodology to the African societies, especially Nigeria. The paper used materials and information from secondary sources and the data were presented in their context. In other words, the secondary source of data is used, especially the internet, to look at the work of UNESCO on education for sustainable development. The paper found that social studies education which is imbedded in the culture and values of society can bring about sustainable development in any society, including that of Africa, with Nigeria inclusive. To this end, we recommend social studies education to be part and parcel of the African education curricula to bring about sustainable development.

Keywords: Culture, Society, Moral, Values.

Introduction

Education takes place throughout life in many forms, none of which ought to be exclusive. We must start to think about education in a more all-encompassing fashion. Social studies education can play a major role in supporting national development and meeting the needs and aspirations of a society such as Nigeria. While the relationship between education and sustainable development is complex, education is the key to a nation's ability to develop and

achieve sustainable development, especially when it is directed to improving agricultural productivity, providing skills for work in new industries, enhancing the status of women, promoting environmental protection, developing capacities for informed and ethical decision-making, and improving the quality of life for all. The focus on Social Studies education for sustainable development in this activity does not imply that these are a definitive set of objectives. Rather, it invites analysis of proposals from one country's education system in order to encourage reflection on what would be an appropriate set of objectives of education for sustainable development in other education systems. The Social Studies education for sustainable development prepared three sets of objectives – knowledge, skills and values – for each of these seven themes.

Conceptualization

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, a personal or cultural value is an absolute or relative ethical value, the assumption of which can be the basis for ethical action. A *value system* is a set of consistent values and measures. A *principle value* is a foundation upon which other values and measures of integrity are based. Those values which are not physiologically determined and normally considered objective, such as a desire to avoid physical pain, seek pleasure, and so on, are considered subjective, vary across individuals and cultures and are in many ways aligned with belief and belief systems. Types of values include ethical/moral value, doctrinal/ideological (religious, political) values, social values, and aesthetic values. It is debated whether some values which are not clearly physiologically determined are intrinsic such as altruism and whether some such as acquisitiveness should be valued as vices or virtues. Values have typically been studied in sociology, anthropology, social psychology, moral philosophy, and business ethics.

Values can be defined as broad preferences concerning appropriate courses of action or outcomes. As such, values reflect a person's sense of right and wrong or what "ought" to be. "Equal rights for all", "Excellence deserves admiration", and "People should be treated with respect and dignity" are representatives of values. Values tend to influence attitudes and behaviour. For example, if you value equal rights for all and you go to work for an organization that treats its managers much better than it does its workers, you may form the attitude that the company is an unfair place to work consequently; you may not produce well or may perhaps leave the company. It is likely that if the company had a more egalitarian policy, your attitude and behaviours would be more positive. According to Massey (1996), values are formed during three significant periods: 1. Imprint period from birth to 7 years; 2. Modelling period from 8 –13 years; and 3. Socialization period from 13 –21 years. Personal values provide an internal reference for what is good, and help solve common human problems for survival by comparative rankings of value, the results of which provide answers to questions of why people do what they do and in what order they choose to do them. Over time the public expression of personal values, that groups of people find important in their day-to-day lives, lays the foundations of law, custom and tradition. Personal values in this way exist in relation to cultural values, either in agreement with or divergent from prevailing norms. A culture is a social system that shares a set of common values, in which such values permit social expectations and collective understandings of the good, the beautiful, and the constructive. Without normative personal values, there would be no cultural reference against which to measure the virtue of individual values and so culture identity would disintegrate.

Wyatt (1996), points out that "'Criteria' are used to refer to 'the standards on which an evaluation is based', values relate then to what one wants and in what order one wants them, criteria can only refer to the evidences for achieving values and act as a comparative standard that one applies in order to evaluate whether goals have been met / values satisfied. Values are obtained in many different ways. The most important piece for building values is a person's family. The family is responsible for teaching children what is right and wrong long before there are other influences. As it is said that a child is a reflection of the parents, as a

child starts school, school helps some to shape the values of children. Then there is religion that the family introduces to a child that plays a role in teaching the right and wrong behaviors.

Cultures have values that are largely shared by their members. The values of a society can often be identified by noting which people receive honour or respect. In the US, for example, professional athletes at the top levels in some sports are honoured (in the form of monetary payment) more than college professors. Surveys show that voters in the United States would be reluctant to elect an atheist as a president, suggesting that belief in God is a value. There is a difference between values clarification and cognitive moral education. Values clarification is "helping people clarify what their lives are for and what is worth working for. Students are encouraged to define their own values and understand others' values." Cognitive moral education is based on the belief that students should learn to value things like democracy and justice as their moral reasoning develops." Educationist Dissanayake (1996), says personal and cultural values can be varied by the living standards of a person.

Values are related to the norms of a culture, but they are more global and abstract than norms. Norms are rules for behavior in specific situations, while values identify what should be judged as good or evil. Flying the national flag on a holiday is a norm, but it reflects the value of patriotism. Wearing dark clothing and appearing solemn are normative behaviours at a funeral. In certain cultures, they reflect the values of respect and support of friends and family. Different cultures reflect different values. "Over the last three decades, traditional-age college students have shown an increased interest in personal well-being and a decreased interest in the welfare of others"(Santrick, 2007). Values seemed to have changed, affecting the beliefs and attitudes of college students. Members take part in a culture even if each member's personal values do not entirely agree with some of the normative values sanctioned in the culture. This reflects an individual's ability to synthesize and extract aspects valuable to them from the multiple subcultures they belong to. If a group member expresses a value that is in serious conflict with the group's norms, the group's authority may carry out various ways of encouraging conformity or stigmatizing the non-conforming behaviour of its members. For example, imprisonment can result from conflict with social norms that have been established as law. Besides, Institutions in the Global Economy can genuinely respect values which are of three kinds based on a "triangle of coherence" (Lamy, 2011). On one side, it lies today within the World Trade Organization (WTO), as well as on the second side within the United Nations - particularly the Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) - providing a framework for global legitimacy through accountability. On the third side, the expertise of member-driven international organizations and civil society depends on the incorporation of flexibilities in the rules, so as to preserve the expression of identity in a globalized world. Nonetheless, in a warlike economic competition, differing visions contradict, particularly on culture. Hence a movie is an artistic creation in Europe, and then benefits from special treatment, while it is only a mere entertainment in the U.S., whatever its own artistic performance. Even within the fragmented Europe, interventionist policies based on the notion of "cultural exception" get opposed to the policy of the "cultural specificity" on the liberal Anglo-Saxon side. Indeed, in international law, films are traditionally seen as property, and the content of television programmes is defined as a service. Consequently cultural interventionist policies get opposed to Anglo-Saxon liberal position, causing failures in international negotiations (Hacker, 2011).

Sustainable development is a term brought into common use by the World Commission in Environment and Development (WCED) in its 1987 seminar report entitled "Our Common Future". The commission built efforts on man whom it was believed as the purvey or end product of development effort. Sustainable development can, therefore, be seen as participatory development, human development and environmental development.

Social Studies Education for Sustainable Development

Education as well as social studies education plays a major role in supporting national development and meeting the needs and aspirations of any society. While the relationship between education and sustainable development is complex, education is the key to a nation's ability to develop and achieve sustainable development, especially when it is directed to improving agricultural productivity, providing skills for work in new industries, enhancing the status of women, promoting environmental protection, developing capacities for informed and ethical decision-making, and improving the quality of life for all, as well as inculcating good moral values for sustainable national development.

In the introduction to *Learning: The Treasure Within*, Jacques Delors (2011), the Chairperson of the UNESCO Commission on Education in the 21st Century, identified many ways in which education and social studies education is contributing to the goals of national development. However, he also noted that economic and social progress has been uneven and often brought with it a widespread sense of disillusionment over the prospects for future generations. Delors described addressing the challenge of finding alternative pathways to social and economic development as “one of the major intellectual and political challenges” of the new century and asked, “How could these great challenges not be a cause for concern in educational policy-making?” He continued:

It is essential that all people with a sense of responsibility turn their attention to both the aims and the means of education ... [to develop] ways in which educational policies can help to create a better world, by contributing to sustainable human development, mutual understanding among peoples and a renewal of practical democracy (Delors, 2011).

As a result, Delors argued that the aim of education in which social studies is imbedded, need to balance and integrate several tensions:

The tension between the global and the local: Education in which social studies education helps young people become world citizens as well as play an active part in the life of their own country and community.

The tension between the universe and the individual: Education helps young people learn how to balance the promises of globalisation and its risks, as well as choose their own future and achieve their full potential within their own cultures.

The tension between tradition and modernity: Education helps young people appreciate and value history and cultural traditions, balancing these with the ethical discernment and cooperative skills to appreciate where change and innovation are necessary and worthwhile.

The tension between long-term and short-term considerations: Education helps young people learn how to balance short- and long-term goals, in the full realization that the solutions to many problems call for patience and a consideration of the needs of future generations.

The tension between competition and cooperation: Education helps young people strive for excellence in all they do whilst balancing the principles of “competition, which provides incentives; co-operation, which gives strength; and solidarity, which unites”.

The tension between the spiritual and the material: Education helps young people act in accordance with their cultural traditions and convictions while paying full respect to pluralism and concern for the well-being of others.

The tension between the existing curriculum and important new areas of knowledge:

This means that the aims of education must balance the best of traditional curriculum content with important new areas of learning “such as self-knowledge, ways to ensure physical and psychological well-being [and] ways to an improved understanding of the natural environment and to preserving it better”.

The Delors Report argued that the aims of education need to respond to and accommodate these tensions – and if it does this successfully, then education will be central to personal, community and national development, enabling all young people to reach their potential, be responsible for our own lives, care for family, friends and neighbours, engage in productive and sustainable employment, contribute to social, cultural and community well-being, minimize the impacts of their lifestyle choices upon the natural world, and engage with others as informed and active citizens in local, national and global contexts.

As a result, *Learning the Treasure Within* proposed that the aims of social studies education be built on four pillars of learning:

- **Learning to know** – knowledge, values and skills for respecting and searching for knowledge and wisdom.
- **Learning to do** – knowledge, values and skills for active engagement in productive employment and recreation.
- **Learning to live together** – knowledge, values and skills for international, intercultural and community cooperation and peace.
- **Learning to be** – knowledge, values and skills for personal and family well-being.

Considering the all encompassing scope of Education as well as social studies education for sustainable development, and its aim to equip individuals with skills and capacities to transform attitudes and lifestyles, we could consider adding a fifth pillar of learning:

- **Learning to transform oneself and society** – knowledge, values and skills for self-reflection and active citizenship.

These five pillars offer a foundation for education to provide both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy, and problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning. These outcomes of education were identified in *World Declaration on Education for All*, Jomtien, 1990.

The long term goal of education for sustainable development covers three objectives:

- to promote understanding of the interdependence of natural, socio-economic and political systems at local, national and global levels.
- to encourage critical reflection and decision making that is reflected in personal lifestyles.
- to engage the active participation of the citizenry in building sustainable development. (Lopez, 1997)

In order to achieve these objectives, “Education for Sustainable Development” ... complements a number of other fields such as environmental education, global education, economics education, development education, multicultural education, conservation education, outdoor education, global change education and others. Education for sustainability is considerably broader and encompasses many aspects of these respected and

established fields of study. It may embrace components from traditional disciplines such as civics, science, geography and others (UNESCO, 1996)

Teachers and schools make a special contribution to Education for Sustainable Development through the educational objectives they emphasise when selecting the content and learning experiences for students to study. The content chosen influences the areas of knowledge to be learnt while the learning experiences chosen determine the skills and attitudes that students will develop. Several organisations have developed lists of knowledge, skills and attitudes objectives of Education for Sustainable Development. Here are three examples:

A non-government organization: One of the earliest sets was proposed by the Canadian educational group, learning for a Sustainable Future.

A local school district: The Dorset Local Education Authority in England identified the following aims and objectives of Education for Sustainable Development:

Educational aims /Social studies education should achieve changes in the community which:

- * Lead to changes in work, lifestyle and consumption patterns.
- * Encourage people to consider alternatives.
- * Enable people to take part in decision making.
- * Enable people to find information.
- * Give people opportunities to participate.
- * Encourage principles leading to a fairer society.
- * Help people to understand the links between issues.

Objectives

Achieving these aims means that education should help students towards the following objectives:

Knowledge	Values	Skills
How natural processes work	A commitment to all living things	Co-operative working
How our lives connect with others	A desire for social justice, empathy and awareness	Critical thinking, negotiation
The planet earth as a finite resource	Understanding of quality of life rights and responsibilities	Reasoned debate problem solving
How to make decisions How we provide for human needs	A global perspective and loyalty to the world community	Creative ability, research & data handling, communication skills

A government committee: The English Panel on Education for Sustainable Development organised its proposed objectives around seven key themes:

- Interdependence of society, economy and the natural environment, from local to global
- Citizenship and stewardship – rights and responsibilities, participation, and co-operation
- Needs and rights of future generations
- Diversity – cultural, social, economic and biological
- Quality of life, equity and justice
- Sustainable change – development and carrying capacity
- Uncertainty and precaution in action.

These seven themes could be seen as central to Education for Sustainable Development. Theme 1 concerns the interdependent nature of the world. This gives rise to Theme 2 – the need for participation and action through the exercise of citizenship and stewardship. Themes 3-6 focus on key dimensions of sustainable development: (i) the needs and rights of future generations, (ii) respect for diversity, (iii) quality of life issues, and (iv) sustainable change. The final theme is a logical consequence of all the preceding themes and is concerned with the limits of knowledge and exercise of the precautionary principle.

Following the above we have a well-developed understanding of the knowledge, skills and values objectives of Education/social studies education for Sustainable Development. The first six themes – interdependence, citizenship and stewardship, future generations, diversity, quality of life and equity, development and carrying capacity and change – contain concepts that are familiar to many teachers. The seventh one – uncertainty and precaution – may not be so familiar. However, it is extremely important that young people develop a clear understanding of this theme. This is because the future is uncertain; it is not possible to be certain about future trends or the effects of different human decisions. Often, we do not have all the scientific information available to make a definite decision about a social, economic or environmental problem. Sometimes, scientists do not agree about the accuracy or relative significance of the information that is available. The lack of certainty about the causes and possible results of the Greenhouse Effect is a good example of this type of problem.

This is where the ‘Precautionary Principle’ needs to become a key guideline for both personal decisions and wider policy making. The Precautionary Principle says that thoughtful preventive action should be taken to address a problem when there is reasonable evidence to indicate the situation could get worse. Topics such as climate change and many others in Education for Sustainable Development require students to appreciate the importance of the uncertainty and precaution. The following list is a set of nine educational benefits of teaching students about the importance of uncertainty and precaution in human affairs:

- Appreciate cultural change
- Ability to listen carefully
- Ability to think creatively
- Understand cultural diversity
- Appreciate different views
- Ability to think critically
- A positive sense of urgency
- Appreciate alternative pathways
- Understand the precautionary principle.

These are very important learning outcomes for students and will benefit them enormously as they grow into adulthood that would bring about sustainable development in our societies.

Conclusion

Social studies education prepares learners for effective citizenship through inculcation of the right culture and values requirements for sustainable development. Social studies is concerned with man's various interactions and interrelationships between man and other men, groups, peers, institutions, and with the physical environment. So in essence educates learners about the way of life and living with the requisite values in a society. Social studies education is conscious of human behaviours, both negative anti-social and positive civil behaviours; and that human relationships are not one type. It is through social studies education that learners learn direct about their varied environments in order to develop sound knowledge, skills, attitudes and values about the environment. From the physical environment, man has contrived many fine products from the available resources to build his home and shelter, produce food and other economic goods to maintain and sustain his survival in the environment for his health that are requisite for sustainable development. To this end, we recommend social studies education to be part and parcel of education curricula in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular to bring about sustainable development

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