

## **Revolutionizing Social Studies Education in Nigeria: Adopting Modern Standards for The Upper Basic School Curriculum**

Muhammad, Sule<sup>1</sup> and Gaya, Zulyadaini Sani<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, Federal University Gusau

<sup>2</sup>Department of Arts and Social Science Education, Faculty of Education, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria

### **Abstract**

This "Revolutionizing Social Studies Education in Nigeria: Adopting Modern Standards for the upper basic school curriculum" explores the modernization of Social Studies education in Nigeria, focusing on aligning the curriculum with 21st-century global standards. Social Studies is an interdisciplinary subject that equips students with the knowledge and skills necessary for responsible citizenship, critical thinking, and global awareness. The paper reviews contemporary approaches such as inquiry-based, project-based, and experiential learning to foster civic competence, digital literacy, and problem-solving skills among learners. The evolving curriculum aims to address Nigeria's socio-cultural context while incorporating global issues such as sustainable development, human rights, and civic engagement. Challenges, including infrastructural limitations, teacher training, and resistance to change, are discussed. The paper concluded that modern Social Studies curriculum, aligned with emerging global standards, equips students with critical thinking skills, digital literacy, and a global perspective while remaining relevant to Nigeria's unique socio-cultural context. This transformation involves integrating interdisciplinary knowledge, fostering civic responsibility, and promoting ethical values. The paper recommended among others that; integrating digital tools, revising curriculum content, and providing continuous professional development. The paper emphasizes the need for collaboration between government, educational stakeholders, and communities to ensure equitable resource distribution, effective implementation, and alignment with national development goals. Ultimately, the transformation of Social Studies education promises to foster engaged citizens capable of addressing local and global challenges.

## Introduction

The world has become more interconnected, and the demands placed on individuals to navigate complex global issues have increased. Skills such as critical thinking, digital literacy, communication, and problem-solving are now seen as essential for students to thrive in both local and global contexts (Muhammad & Ibrahim, 2023). In response, there has been a push to reform and modernize Social Studies education in Nigeria to meet these emerging demands. In addition, Nigeria's socio-political landscape has continued to change, with challenges such as ethnic conflicts, political instability, corruption, poverty, and environmental degradation shaping the lives of its citizens. Addressing these issues in a meaningful way requires a modern curriculum that emphasizes not only civic competence but also global citizenship and social justice. Nigeria seeks to build a generation of active, responsible citizens, transforming the Social Studies curriculum has become an educational priority (Muhammad, 2023).

Globally, education systems are increasingly aligning with frameworks such as the

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which promote quality education, global citizenship, and sustainability. Nigeria is no exception. The country's educational policymakers recognize the need to integrate these global standards into the Social Studies curriculum. This involves emphasizing 21st-century competencies, such as critical thinking, collaboration, and environmental awareness, while still addressing the unique socio-cultural needs of Nigeria. In recent years, educational reforms in Nigeria have included efforts to review the national curriculum to ensure it aligns with international best practices (FME, 2023). These reforms aim to incorporate more modern pedagogical approaches, such as inquiry-based learning, experiential education, and the use of technology in teaching Social Studies. These approaches not only make learning more engaging but also prepare students to tackle real-world challenges.

Social Studies education in Nigeria has long been recognized as a vital component of the school curriculum, aimed at developing informed, responsible citizens capable of

contributing to society. Introduced in the 1960s as a response to post-colonial challenges, Social Studies sought to instill civic responsibility, national unity, and social cohesion. In a diverse country like Nigeria, with its vast ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity, Social Studies plays a crucial role in fostering understanding, tolerance, and national integration (Muhammad, 2023). Historically, Social Studies education in Nigeria has focused on teaching learners about history, geography, government, economics, and civic responsibilities. These subjects were intended to equip students with the knowledge to engage in community affairs, understand governance, and respect the cultural and social fabric of the nation. However, in recent decades, there has been a growing recognition that the traditional approach to Social Studies education is not fully adequate in preparing students for the challenges of the 21st century.

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

Social Studies education is an interdisciplinary subject that integrates knowledge from various fields of the social sciences, such as history, geography, political science, sociology, and economics, to help students develop an understanding of society

and their roles as active citizens. Prepare learners for effective participation in a democratic society by fostering civic competence, critical thinking, and a global perspective. Social Studies education is to prepare students to become responsible, engaged citizens who can contribute to the public good, respect cultural diversity, and navigate the complexities of a democratic and increasingly interconnected world. National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) (2019) defined Social Studies education is the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Social Studies Education develop students' ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good in a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interconnected world. Social Studies is an academic discipline that integrates knowledge from various social sciences to study human society and social relationships (Muhammad, 2023). It aims to provide students with an understanding of the world around them, including its history, geography, political systems, economics, and cultural dynamics. While Texas Education Agency (2020) stated that Social Studies education involves teaching students about

history, geography, economics, government, and citizenship, with a focus on critical thinking, civic awareness, and preparing students for responsible participation in a global society.

However, UNESCO (2021) sees Social Studies education as multidisciplinary approach that equips learners with the skills, values, and knowledge needed to understand and address social issues, with a focus on sustainable development, global citizenship, and human rights. Social Studies Education is preparing individuals to be informed, responsible, and active participants in their communities and the broader world. United Nations (2022) put forth that Social Studies education focuses on fostering understanding of social, political, and economic systems, promoting global citizenship, human rights, and environmental sustainability. Social Studies Education encourages critical engagement with global and local social challenges. Smith (2023) Social Studies defined education is an interdisciplinary field that prepares students to critically analyze the structures of society, governance, and their relationships with the environment. Social Studies Education emphasizes civic responsibility, digital literacy, and addressing

contemporary global issues such as inequality and climate change Muhammad, Adamu & Usman, 2023. Social Studies Education focuses on fostering civic competence by developing critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills, enabling learners to address local, national, and global challenges.

### **Components of Social Studies**

Social Studies Education has numerous components among others are included;

1. **History:** Examines past events, civilizations, and historical figures to understand how they have shaped the present and influence the future.
2. **Geography:** Focuses on the study of physical landscapes, environmental processes, and spatial relationships, as well as how humans interact with and impact their environment.
3. **Political Science:** Investigates the structures, functions, and processes of government and political systems, including the roles of citizens and institutions in governance.
4. **Economics:** Explores the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services, as well as economic systems and the

factors that influence economic decision-making.

5. **Sociology:** Studies social behavior, institutions, and structures, including how societies are organized and how individuals interact within these social systems.

6. **Cultural Studies:** Looks at cultural norms, values, beliefs, and practices, and how these influence and shape societies (Barr, Barth & Sherms, 2020).

### **Objectives of Social Studies**

- i. **Civic Competence:** To prepare students to be informed and engaged citizens who understand their rights and responsibilities and participate actively in democratic processes.
- ii. **Critical Thinking:** To develop students' ability to analyze, evaluate, and make reasoned decisions about social issues and events.
- iii. **Global Awareness:** To foster an understanding of global issues and interconnectedness, encouraging students to appreciate cultural diversity and work towards global solutions.
- iv. **Problem-Solving Skills:** To equip students with the skills to address societal challenges

and contribute to their communities effectively (Cogan & Morris, 2022).

### **Objectives of Upper Basic School Social Studies Education in Nigeria**

The objectives of Upper Basic School Social Studies education in Nigeria generally include:

- a) **Promoting Civic Responsibility:** Instilling values of citizenship and encouraging active participation in community and national activities.
- b) **Understanding Social Structures:** Teaching students about the structure and functioning of society, including family, community, and government.
- c) **Developing Critical Thinking:** Encouraging students to analyze and critically evaluate social issues and historical events.
- d) **Fostering National Integration:** Promoting unity and understanding among Nigeria's diverse ethnic and cultural groups.
- e) **Encouraging Social Skills:** Helping students develop interpersonal skills and learn about social norms and behaviors.
- f) **Understanding Global Issues:** Providing knowledge about global issues and

fostering a sense of global citizenship (Diems & Murphy, 2021).

### **The objectives of social studies education in Nigeria**

1. **Promotion of National Unity:** Social studies education aims to foster a sense of national identity and unity among students, promoting understanding and cooperation across Nigeria's diverse ethnic and cultural groups. This aligns with the Nigerian philosophy of education, which seeks to build a cohesive and integrated nation.

2. **Development of Citizenship Skills:** The curriculum is designed to equip students with the knowledge and skills needed for active and responsible citizenship. This includes understanding civic rights and responsibilities, participating in democratic processes, and contributing to societal development, reflecting Nigeria's goal of creating informed and engaged citizens (Muhammad & Ibrahim, 2023).

3. **Cultural Awareness and Appreciation:** Social studies education emphasizes the importance of understanding and valuing Nigeria's rich cultural heritage. It aims to foster respect for cultural diversity and traditions, which is consistent with the

philosophy of promoting cultural awareness and preservation.

4. **Economic and Social Development:** The curriculum is intended to address issues related to economic and social development, including poverty alleviation, sustainable development, and social justice. This reflects Nigeria's educational objective of contributing to the country's overall development and improving living standards.

5. **Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving:** Social studies education encourage students to analyze societal problems, develop critical thinking skills, and propose solutions. This objective supports Nigeria's philosophy of fostering innovative and analytical minds capable of addressing contemporary challenges (Evans & Saxe, 2021).

### **Historical Overview of Social Studies Education in Nigeria**

#### **a) Pre-Independence Era (Before 1960)**

**Colonial Influence:** Social studies as a distinct subject did not exist. The colonial education system emphasized British history and culture, focusing more on religious and moral education rather than a comprehensive

understanding of Nigerian society (Finkel, 2023).

#### **b) Post-Independence (1960-1980)**

**Early Post-Independence Developments:** After Nigeria gained independence in 1960, there was a shift towards developing an education system that reflected Nigerian values and needs. Social studies began to be introduced as a subject to promote national unity and integrate diverse ethnic groups. In 1969, the National Curriculum Conference recognized the importance of social studies in promoting civic consciousness and understanding of societal structures (Levstik & Barton, 2022). The subject aimed to build national identity and foster unity among Nigeria's diverse population.

#### **c) Expansion and Reforms (1980s-2000s)**

**Growth and Expansion:** The 1980s saw increased emphasis on social studies as a core subject in the curriculum. Educational policies began to integrate social studies more deeply into the national education framework, focusing on issues such as national development, democracy, and societal values. Various educational reforms were introduced to update the social studies curriculum. The National Policy on

Education (NPE), first published in 1977 and revised subsequently, included social studies as an essential component aimed at fostering civic responsibility and national integration (Nwanko & Adeyemi, 2023).

#### **d) Contemporary Developments (2000s-Present)**

**Modernization and Integration:** The 2000s brought a focus on modernizing the curriculum to address contemporary issues such as globalization, environmental challenges, and technological advancements. The subject aims to develop critical thinking, global awareness, and active citizenship among students.

Recent revisions to the curriculum have sought to make social studies more relevant to current societal needs and challenges (NCSS, 2023). There has been an emphasis on integrating themes like sustainable development, human rights, and civic engagement.

#### **Overview of 21st Century skills in teaching Upper Basic School social studies education in Nigeria**

Teaching upper basic school Social Studies in Nigeria with a focus on 21st-century skills involves integrating various competencies that align with modern educational standards.

Here's an overview of how these skills is applied:

1. **Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving:** Encouraging students to analyze social issues, evaluate different perspectives, and develop solutions to community and global problems.
2. **Digital Literacy:** Incorporating technology into lessons, such as using digital maps, online research, and educational software, to enhance understanding and engagement.
3. **Collaboration and Communication:** Fostering group work and discussions to help students develop teamwork and effective communication skills. Projects and presentations can be used to promote these skills.
4. **Civic Competence:** Teaching students about their rights and responsibilities, local and global citizenship, and the importance of active participation in societal issues.
5. **Cultural Awareness:** Integrating lessons on cultural diversity, history, and global interdependence to build a well-rounded perspective on different cultures and societies.

6. **Ethical and Responsible Use of Information:** Emphasizing the importance of integrity, proper citation, and understanding the impact of misinformation.

7. **Adaptability and Lifelong Learning:** Encouraging a mindset of continuous learning and adaptability to change, preparing students for evolving societal and workplace demands (Parker, 2021).

### **Curriculum innovation in teaching and learning social studies education in Upper Basic School in Nigeria**

Curriculum innovation in teaching and learning social studies at the upper basic school level in Nigeria focuses on the following strategies:

1. **Curriculum Design and Content:** Adapt the curriculum to reflect local and national contexts, including Nigerian history, geography, and cultural diversity. Integrate social studies with other subjects like economics, political science, and environmental studies to provide a more holistic understanding.
2. **Teaching Methods:** Encourage students to ask questions and explore topics in-depth, fostering critical thinking and independent research skills. Use group activities, projects, and discussions to promote teamwork and



communication skills. Experiential Learning: which included; field trips, simulations, and role-playing to provide practical experience and enhance engagement.

3. Use of Technology: Incorporate multimedia presentations, educational apps, and online resources to make lessons more interactive and up-to-date. Utilize online platforms for remote learning and collaboration, especially in areas with limited resources.

4. Assessment and Evaluation: Use a variety of assessment methods, including formative assessments, project-based evaluations, and peer reviews, to gauge student understanding and skills.

5. Feedback Mechanisms: Provide constructive feedback to guide students' learning and address areas needing improvement.

6. Professional Development: Offer regular workshops and training sessions to equip teachers with the latest pedagogical techniques and technological tools.

7. Peer Learning: Encourage sharing of best practices among educators to foster a culture of continuous improvement.

8. Inclusivity and Diversity: Ensure the curriculum reflects the diverse backgrounds

of students and promotes understanding and respect for different cultures and perspectives. Adapt teaching methods to cater to the varying learning needs and abilities of students (Parker, 2022).

### **Modern pedagogical approaches in teaching and learning Social Studies education in Upper Basic Schools in Nigeria.**

#### **1. Inquiry-Based Learning:**

Encourages students to ask questions, conduct research, and engage in problem-solving. This method helps students develop critical thinking skills and a deeper understanding of social studies concepts. Students learn by asking questions, investigating topics, and conducting research. While teachers pose questions related to social studies topics and guide students in exploring these questions through research, discussions, and analysis. Inquiry method encourages curiosity and deepens understanding (Diems & Murphy, 2021).

#### **2. Project-Based Learning (PBL):**

Involves students working on a project over an extended period, which allows them to explore real-world problems and develop solutions. This approach helps students connect theoretical knowledge with practical

applications. Students engage in a project that requires them to apply knowledge and skills to solve real-world problems. While teachers design projects related to social studies topics (e.g., creating a model of a historical city or developing a plan for community improvement). Students work collaboratively, conduct research, and present their findings.

**3. Collaborative Learning:** Emphasizes group work and cooperative activities.

Students work together to complete tasks or projects, which fosters teamwork, communication skills, and a deeper understanding of the material. Learning is enhanced through group work and peer interactions. Students work in groups on assignments or projects, which fosters teamwork and communication.

**4. Technology Integration:** Utilizes digital tools and resources, such as interactive simulations, online databases, and educational software, to enhance learning experiences and provide access to a wide range of information. Uses digital tools and resources to support learning. Teachers incorporate technology such as educational

software, online simulations, and interactive whiteboards.

**5. Experiential Learning:** Learning is enhanced through group work and peer interactions. Students work in groups on assignments or projects, which fosters teamwork and communication. This approach also allows students to learn from each other and gain diverse perspectives. Learning through direct experience, such as field trips, simulations, and role-playing activities.

**6. Differentiated Instruction:** Tailors teaching methods and materials to accommodate diverse learning styles and abilities. This ensures that all students can access and engage with the content effectively. Adapts teaching methods to meet the diverse needs of students. Teachers modify their approach based on students' varying learning styles, abilities, and interests. This might include providing different types of resources, offering varied assignments, or using different teaching strategies.

**7. Flipped Classroom:** Students learn new content at home through videos or readings and use class time for interactive activities and discussions. This approach

allows for more active learning during class time. Shifts the traditional lecture outside of the classroom and uses class time for interactive activities.

8. Students watch instructional videos or read materials at home, and class time is used for discussions, group work, and application of concepts (Ojo, 2023).

### **Challenges in adopting new standard modern curriculum in teaching social studies in upper basic schools in Nigeria**

Adopting a new standard modern curriculum for teaching social studies in upper basic schools in Nigeria can face several challenges, including:

1. **Infrastructure Limitations:** Many schools may lack the necessary facilities, such as updated libraries, computer labs, and internet access, to support the modern curriculum effectively.
2. **Teacher Training and Professional Development:** Educators might need extensive training to adapt to new teaching methodologies and integrate new content effectively. Ongoing professional development is crucial.
3. **Resource Constraints:** There may be a shortage of instructional materials, such as

textbooks and multimedia resources, aligned with the new curriculum.

4. **Resistance to Change:** Some educators, parents, and school administrators may resist changes due to unfamiliarity with the new curriculum or concerns about its effectiveness.

5. **Curriculum Implementation:** Ensuring consistency in implementation across different schools and regions can be challenging, especially in diverse educational contexts.

6. **Assessment and Evaluation:** Developing and implementing new assessment tools that align with the modern curriculum can be complex and time-consuming.

7. **Funding and Budgeting:** Financial constraints can limit the ability of schools to acquire new resources or provide necessary training for teachers.

8. **Cultural and Regional Differences:** Adapting the curriculum to reflect local contexts and address regional differences while maintaining standardization can be challenging (Hess & McAvoy, 2022).

### **Conclusion**

Embracing emerging standards in Social Studies education offers a pathway to

cultivating a generation of learners who are not only well-informed about their own society but also equipped to engage with global issues. This transformation will foster a more engaged, responsible, and competent citizenry, ultimately contributing to the advancement of Nigerian society and the broader global community. Modern Social Studies curriculum, aligned with emerging global standards, equips students with critical thinking skills, digital literacy, and a global perspective while remaining relevant to Nigeria's unique socio-cultural context. This transformation involves integrating interdisciplinary knowledge, fostering civic responsibility, and promoting ethical values. It also requires innovative pedagogical approaches, ongoing teacher professional development, and robust assessment methods. The shift towards a contemporary Social Studies curriculum presents both challenges and opportunities.

### **Suggestions**

1. Social studies curriculum reviewers should revise the curriculum to include contemporary global issues, 21st-century skills, and interdisciplinary approaches to reflect Nigeria's socio-cultural context.

2. Education stakeholders should establish comprehensive and continuous professional development programs focused on innovative teaching strategies, digital literacy, and current global issues.

3. Education stakeholders should provide workshops, seminars, and online courses to keep social studies teachers updated.

4. Social Studies teachers should incorporate digital tools, multimedia resources, and online platforms into teaching to enhance student engagement and facilitate access to diverse perspectives and information.

5. Social Studies teachers should develop assessment strategies that focus on evaluating students' ability to apply knowledge and skills in practical situations by using assessments that measure critical thinking, problem-solving, and civic competence among the learners

6. Government and non-governmental organization should allocate funds for updating educational materials, digital tools, and classroom infrastructure to support the modernized curriculum and teaching practices.

7. Government and education stakeholders should ensure equitable distribution of resources across urban and rural areas to provide all students with access to high-quality Social Studies education.

8. Involve parents, community leaders, and local organizations in the educational process to build support for curriculum changes and enhance the relevance of Social Studies education.

9. National Orientation Agency of Nigeria should conduct awareness campaigns to inform stakeholders about the benefits and goals of the curriculum transformation, fostering a supportive environment for educational reform.

10. Federal Ministry of Education should establish mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the curriculum transformation process to ensure that objectives are being met and to make necessary adjustments based on feedback and outcomes.

11. Social Studies curriculum reviewers should develop curriculum content that reflects Nigeria's diverse cultural, ethnic, and regional contexts, promoting social cohesion and respect for diversity.

12. Social Studies scholars should integrate discussions on local and national social issues such as governance, social justice, and environmental sustainability to make learning more relevant and impactful.

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Received on Sep 29, 2024

Accepted on Nov 05, 2024

Published on Jan 01, 2025

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