

INFUSION OF CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN THE UNDERGRADUATE SOCIAL STUDIES PROGRAMS OF TWO NATIONAL UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper was to gain deeper insights into the way Social Studies programs are structured and taught in two national universities; one from Botswana and the other one from Nigeria; including, the extent of the infusion and presentation of contemporary issues in their Social Studies programs, program similarities, and the challenges faced by lecturers in the teaching of topics related to contemporary issues at the undergraduate level. Using a survey approach and document analysis, this paper examines how contemporary issues, such as HIV/AIDS, drug abuse, child abuse, social policy, violence, reproductive health, climate change, to mention a few, are infused in the Social Studies programs of the two institutions under study, one each from Nigeria and Botswana. Methods of data collection were both qualitative and quantitative and they included case study of the Social Studies programs at the two universities. It was found that the Social Studies programs were structured along the use of integrated methodology with the infusion of contemporary issues across their courses and a high degree of similar content areas and challenges. The recommendations focused on the availability of teaching materials, enlarged classroom space, regular workshops, the use of external examiners, regular program reviews, among others.

Keywords: Infusion, Social Studies, Contemporary issues, Teaching, Learning, Extent, Structure

Introduction

Following the 1968 Mombassa Conference in Kenya, African countries were encouraged to fully introduce Social Studies into their education systems across the African continent (Adeyemi, 2010: p. 250). The countries that adopted Social Studies in their various curricula included Botswana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, The Gambia, Liberia, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Malawi, Somalia, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Social Studies was seen as a new curriculum innovation with the following objectives for schools in Africa: (1) to enable students to understand people's interaction with their cultural, social and physical environments; (2) to help students appreciate their homes and heritages; (3) to develop skills and attitudes expected of citizens; and (4) to teach students to express their ideas in a variety of ways (Merryfield, 1991: p. 621).

All the four objectives have implications for the development and constant review of programs and courses at all levels of education, and in this case Social Studies at the schools and faculties of education at the tertiary level of education in Africa. This study purposively concerns itself with two selected national universities in Africa: one in Nigeria and one in Botswana where Social Studies programs are available at the undergraduate level.

There has always been an emphasis on the teaching and learning of contemporary issues in Social Studies at universities in Africa. This study is therefore vital if the structures, organization, themes, among others, on the infusion of these issues are to be understood between and among institutions, and particularly in the area of program development and review. Recent developments in the world have necessitated the infusion of contemporary issues such as HIV/AIDS, drug use, misuse and abuse, child abuse, passion killing, reproductive health, climate change, and some societal values into the teaching and learning of Social Studies at the tertiary level of education in Africa. The fusion of relevant contemporary themes or topics in the programs of tertiary institutions was seen as a way of producing graduates with the necessary skills of imparting knowledge to students, so that they would be able to function effectively in the global arena.

Objectives of Study

The objectives of this study were to find out:

1. The structure of Social Studies curricula (in terms of the integrated and the single discipline curriculum approaches) at the two selected universities, one in Botswana and two in Nigeria;
2. The extent to which contemporary issues are infused in their Social Studies programs;
3. The similarities with respect to the contents on contemporary issues in their Social Studies curricula;
4. The challenges faced by Social Studies teaching staff while teaching topics on contemporary issues; and
5. The solutions to the identified challenges faced by the teaching staff of the institutions under study.

Research Questions

The following research questions guarded the investigation of this research:

1. How are the Social Studies programs/curricula at the two selected universities in Botswana and Nigeria structured in terms of integrated and single discipline approaches?
2. To what extent are contemporary issues infused in their Social Studies programs?
3. Are there some similarities with respect to the contemporary contents in the curricula of the two selected institutions?
4. What challenges are faced by the Social Studies teaching staff in the teaching of contemporary issues?
5. How can the identified challenges faced by lecturers be solved?

Justification of the Research

In a changing world, academic curricula should be influenced, reinforced, challenged and changed by cross-national studies. It is through comparative analysis that curriculum developers and researchers can gain an enriched understanding of how social, cultural, political, and economic factors shape current debates about the contemporary issues, skills and civic capabilities needed by learners in local and global contexts (Torney-Purta, 1991).

Accordingly, this study is capable of contributing significantly to the Social Studies curriculum development literature. It may also help inform curriculum review and improvement in the selected institutions and beyond. International comparative research informs the profession of what is going on in different cultures pertaining to some phenomena.

The findings emanating from this investigation may be used by educators to improve existing programs in their various institutions. Since program development and curriculum writing are a continuous process, this study may be capable of providing the much-needed information on the wherewithal of curriculum infusion in institutions of higher learning, not only in Africa but beyond. Further, the networking of scholars in Social Studies and related fields of study may result from this investigation. The knowledge about contemporary issues may help deepen the perspectives of students and enable them to function in an increasingly diverse global society. It is very necessary through this type of study to add to existing literature of balancing past and present issues with a view to making the future better than both the past and the present.

Brief Literature Review

Reconstructionist Views

This section deals with a brief literature review on contemporary issues in Social Studies. Contemporary issues in Social Studies programs and curricula have their roots in the Progressive education movement of the early century. Reconstructionist philosophy engenders the role of school as an agency for social improvement. The Reconstructionist philosophy approach to education tries to

foresee future social directions by analysis of past and present trends and then tries to improve on existing practices, with a view to restructure the present to suit the future generations of school leavers. Restructuring here may be in form of the organization of themes or topics or the way facts and figures are presented to the students, in other words, the subject or the recommended integrated method of teaching Social Studies in schools.

The innovation of instructional methods and emergence of reconstructive curriculum development, for example: environmental education and sex education, are not only restorative, but also transformational given the critical challenges of drug addiction, pollution, HIV/AIDS pandemic and other forms of resource depletion (Gill, 2003). In the case of the two institutions under investigation, efforts are made to research into the documents of how and to what extent their programs have contemporary issues infused in them.

While restoration of African values from the past is very important, the revitalization of culture through efforts to solve current problems and crises by including emerging issues in the Social Studies programs of institutions is equally vital. Several authors have asked the question of what kind of future society is emerging. What type of programs will enhance the survival of young people in the future?

Infusion of Themes or Topics

The path to equipping the future generations may lie in the infusion of contemporary issues in the programs of institutions. Infusion of contemporary issues in schools is bound to have positive consequences for individual students and for the larger society. Knopf (1996), Gourdine and Sanders (2003) consider an infused model of teaching as the spreading of contemporary issues across courses within a curriculum and also using facts from many angles to clarify or examine the topics. In support of this assertion, Kowalski (1995) asserts that systematic integration of information should be embarked upon by schools throughout the entire curriculum.

Davies (2006) further sees an infusion approach to as a vital way of enhancing critical thinking in schools. Stockman, Boulton and Robinson (2008) perceives infusion as an action outcome that mixes together as if by melting or blending one entity into another with the goal of blending or integrating the two to make a whole. In infusing issues across the curriculum, emerging issues such as alcohol abuse, tobacco abuse, and other drug prevention strategies using real-life situations may be used as the context for teaching academic skills and knowledge.

Integrated vis-a-vis Single Subject Approach

This section concerns the methods used by teachers in disseminating information to students during the teaching-learning process. Depending on the topic, do teachers use the single method approach or the integrated approach of teaching Social Studies in the classroom? Literature in this area shows that the recommended methodology recommended at the 1968 Mombassa Conference emphasized the use of integrated method of teaching Social Studies but teachers hardly utilize the method (Adeyemi, 2010). Teachers are usually biased in favor of either the single subject or the integrated approach depending on their training.

This is where the Gestalt psychology is at play. The Gestalt psychology believes in the slogan of 'the whole is greater than the sum of its parts'. Invariably, it is opposed to the traditional scientific method of teaching and learning of the social science disciplines separately as Geography, Sociology, Economics, and other related fields which tend to divide the object of study into a set of elements that could be treated or analyzed separately (Hartmann, 1935). Rather, the theory is in support of the principles of the concept of totality whereby disciplines are organized and presented as a system of dynamic relationships e.g. integrated Social Studies consisting of Economics, Geography, History, Political Science and other related disciplines (Polster and Polster, 1974).

Challenges Faced by Teachers

Literature has documented many challenges faced by Social Studies teachers which include inadequate instructional materials, teaching methods, attitudes toward Social Studies as a course of study, teacher training, and remunerations of teachers, among others (Adeyemi, 2013; Gbenu, 2012; Hover & Yeager, 2004). Other challenges faced by teachers at almost all levels of education include lack of adequate motivation, and poor professional, and personal and public image, large class size resulting in high teacher-student ratio, classroom management and the use of new teaching technologies.

Methodology

The methodology of this study involves both the qualitative and the quantitative approaches. The qualitative aspects include document study in the form of Social Studies programs from the two institutions under study, their course descriptions and objectives, content integration which includes contemporary issues, instructional resources and materials, faculty and student views and learning styles on contemporary issues, instructional strategies and assessment diversification. Responses involving interviews from a few of the teaching staff are also used in the interpretation of data.

The quantitative aspect involves the use of survey and document review which resulted into the calculation of the level of agreement (kappa) arising from the content analysis of the contents/topics dealing with contemporary issues in the two institutions under study. This enables the investigator to determine the level of similarity between the Social Studies programs in the two universities. This Content analysis also enables the investigator to make valid inferences from the data to their context. It also involves the use of simple descriptive statistics.

The investigator has purposively chosen a national university in Botswana (University of Botswana) and a national university in Nigeria (Obafemi Awolowo University) for this investigation. For the purpose of confidentiality, the two universities were coded as Universities A and B so that only the investigator could identify which university stands for letter A or B.

Procedures

This study took place between January and May 2014. This includes campus visitations, consultations and collection of relevant Social Studies documents. The early phase between January and February, 2014 resulted in the familiarization and contextualization of the target Social Studies programs at the two national universities.

The second phase between March and April, 2014 covers the period for interviews, and analysis of goals, contents and themes on contemporary issues in the three universities. The expected outcome during this phase is the understanding of the knowledge of the relationships between and among educational policies, academic contents, pedagogical processes and how contemporary issues intersect in the three institutions. The last phase of this study resulted in the writing of the first draft of the manuscript and making necessary revisions.

Results

Structure of Social Studies Curricula

The data analyses involve sequential treatment of data according to the research objectives and questions numbered from 1 to 5 earlier. Table 1 that follows concerns the structure of the Social Studies curricula in the two universities as to the emphasis and adoption of the use the integrated methodology in teaching the contents to students.

Table 1: The Structure of Social Studies Curricula

University	Emphasis of the Use of Integrated Curriculum
A	Yes
B	Yes

An examination of the *Handbooks/Prospectuses* from the two universities depicts that the recommended integrated methodology of teaching Social Studies was adopted in their curricula. This methodology was recommended at the Mombassa conference of 1968 for the effective teaching of Social Studies in schools. A part of the content of a course in one of the universities “IED 151- Introduction to Social Studies” includes the teaching of ‘Social Studies as an integrated and interdisciplinary concept’ (Obafemi Awolowo University, Faculty of Education/Institute of Education *Handbook* of 2011-2015, p. 44).

At the University of Botswana, Faculty of Education, Department of Languages and Social Sciences *Departmental Booklet* 2006-2007, pp.27-28, Social Studies is taught with the use of integrated methodology. ELC 201 –Foundations of Social Studies describes the emergence and evolutionary development of Social Studies which by implication adopts the integrated methodology of teaching Social Studies while ELC321 – Social Studies Teaching Methods/Models equips students with model of teaching and ELC411 – Curriculum Development for Social Studies Teachers emphasizes the problems encountered in defining objectives and organizing single and multidisciplinary programs. In a nutshell, the two universities under investigation, according to Table 1 have structured their programs with the emphasis of teaching Social Studies with the use of the integrated methodology.

Infusion of Contemporary Issues

Table 2 below deals with the extent to which the three identified universities have infused contemporary issues in their Social Studies curricula. Contemporary issues in this case can be defined as present day issues of interest to humans and the society. The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2000, p. 295) defines the word ‘contemporary’ as ‘belonging to the present time’. For Social Studies Education, it goes further to build on the past and the present in order to make provisions for a better tomorrow. For instance, the study and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases had existed in the past and the present, but as new and deadly species, e. g. HIV/AIDS, it becomes necessary to break the ‘silence and the no-go area of teaching’ to teach new and emerging issues in the school curriculum.

Table 2: The Extent of Infusion of Contemporary Issues

University	Extent of Infusion
A	High
B	High

A classification of ‘low’ was assigned to a situation where topics on contemporary issues were found to be less than 30% of the entire topics of the course content, ‘moderate’ to topics between 31 and 50 % and ‘high’ when over 50%. With regard to Social Studies programs at the two national universities, it means that relevant issues, topics and themes that are emerging and relevant to the current era of today are taught in Social Studies. Topics relevant to current societal problems and solutions to them such as climate change, drug use and abuse, marital problems and solutions, HIV and AIDS education, immigration issues, family life education and many others may form part and parcel of the Social Studies curriculum.

One of the universities under study has some courses e.g. – IED 154 – The Family in Traditional and Contemporary Societies, IED 355 – Environmental Education and Sustainable Development, IED 454 – Urban Development and Social Problems, to mention a few. Another university has ELC 421 – Global Perspectives and Materials in Social Studies – which examines the emerging notion of a world as a global village, EEL 401 – Environmental Education Strategies, among others from which Social Studies students can offer. Another university has also encouraged the infusion of HIV/AIDS education in all its programs, to sensitize students to the better understanding of the pandemic. Generally, the three universities have developed their Social Studies curricula to cater for contemporary issues and the extent of infusion is rated high.

Program Similarities

An examination of the Social Studies course outlines and descriptions, and other available documents in the two universities depicts the inclusion of similar topics and themes in their programs. Table 3 that follow shows how similar the courses are with respect to their course titles and course descriptions.

Table 3: The Similarities in Their Curricula

Universities	Similarities
A and B	Almost similar. Culture – Bias

A content analysis of the course titles and descriptions of five similar courses dealing with infusion of contemporary issues in Social Studies programs in the two national universities indicates a high degree of similar topics and themes in their programs. A content analysis, according to Krippendorff (2004, p. 21) which enables the replication and the making of valid inferences with the use of similar courses was adopted. An 84% agreement (or similarities, kappa of 0.84, ($p < 0.000$)) in terms of contents dealing with contemporary issues was recorded between the two universities. Some of these contents encompassing aspects of concepts of citizenship, the role of the family in development, sustainable development, HIV/AIDS issues, poverty, urban issues, problems of public utilities, environmental issues, among others, are emphasized by the two universities in their respective *Handbooks and Departmental Booklets*.

An aspect of note in the two universities is the culture-bias inherent in the topics and themes of their programs. While the description of the Social Studies courses indicate the inclusion of Pan-Africanism and issues on the African continent in addition to domestic issues, emphasis on international/continental themes seems to be higher than that of the African continent or environment. The African Social Studies Program, apart from recommending the teaching and learning of domestic and national issues, also gives credit to issues confronting the African continent.

The Challenges or Problems faced by Teachers in Teaching Contemporary Issues

In examining the challenges faced by teachers in the fusion and teaching of contemporary issues in their Social Studies programs, the problems across the institutions are very similar and not peculiar to a specific university. To this end, what challenges or problems do lecturers face in teaching contemporary issues? While many challenges are faced by the lecturers, Table 4 below shows the major challenges faced by the lecturers in teaching contemporary issues in the teaching-learning process.

Table 4: The Challenges faced in Teaching Contemporary Issues

Universities	Challenges
A and B	Teaching Materials Classroom Space Large Class Size

The lecturers posited that teaching materials have posed a great challenge to the teaching of contemporary issues in the classrooms. These teaching materials include the availability of current textbooks which deal with treatment of current and emerging issues locally, regionally and internationally. When available, they are very few in numbers and exorbitant in prices. As a result, it is often the case to depend on textbooks from abroad which may not treat topics on contemporary issues from the standpoint of African perspective.

In addition, the use of technology in teaching is difficult because of the cost of laptops, appropriate software, overhead projectors, films and filmstrips. The use of the technology of blackboard, modules, and other online delivery of contents to learners is a challenge because of costs, and in particular the constant failure of electricity. In short, the much publicized use of e-learning is regarded as an ideal, but in actual fact an elusive means of teaching. More often than not, because of large class sizes, it is difficult to impart contents dealing with contemporary issues to students. The teacher-student ratio is as high as 1: 250 in some Social Studies classes and therefore, teacher-student interaction is difficult. In this type of situation, the depth and quality of teaching and learning are compromised.

Solutions to the Identified Challenges

Similar solutions have been put forward by the lecturers, by way of interviews and observations. Table 5 which follows summarizes the solutions as identified by the lecturers.

Table 5: The Suggested Solutions to the Identified Challenges

Suggested Solutions
Availability/Publication of New Materials
Large Classroom Space
Regular Local and International Workshops/Conferences
Benchmarking of Social Studies Programs
Local and International External Examiners' Reports
Regular Program Reviews
Reduction of Culture Bias

The recommendation that new teaching materials on contemporary issues be published and readily made available cuts across the three national universities. It was also suggested that the costs of these books and materials should be reduced by way of low duty by various governments. In order to reduce teacher-student ratio, it was suggested that spacious classrooms in form of teaching theaters be available for large classes. The employment of more lecturers could also reduce high teacher-student ratio.

Regular attendance at local and international workshops and conferences to enable lecturers keep abreast of current and contemporary issues in their field has also been suggested. This according to them will enable lecturers to be current in the methodology and the subject matter of contemporary issues.

It was also suggested that programs of various universities be studied and standardized topics or themes be agreed upon as benchmark to be used at various universities where Social Studies programs are available. In fact, the use of external examiners can also go a long way to further enhance the teaching of contemporary issues in universities. The reports emanating from the external examiners can suggest the way and means of enriching the themes on contemporary issues at various universities. Such reports can lead to universities reviewing their Social Studies programs regularly to cater for emerging and contemporary issues. Curriculum development should consider the needs of the society at present and in the future. This may necessitate the need to conduct a needs analysis of what a society needs currently and in the future.

Through these efforts, culture-biases in terms of topics and themes can be reduced to make way for a broad perspective of dealing with and teaching contemporary issues at the universities. Since it is recognized that cultures differ in the way people visualize phenomena, topics or themes pertaining to a particular culture may be prominent in the topics and themes of a Social Studies curriculum or program, depending on the cultural background or location of the institution.

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