

SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION IN GHANA: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE (1940-PRESENT)

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ABSTRACT

Social studies education and instruction have gone through several cycles of change from an integrated curriculum and multiple subject curriculum since the 1940s. This article examines these changes and the historical context of these changes –spanning the period from the 1940 to post-1987 education reform classroom. Through this historical review, it becomes clear that there have been frequent reforms in the social studies curriculum.. Indeed, the introduction of the New Education Reform of the 1987 actually stabilized the Social Studies education. The stabilization of social studies in the current era of Ghana’s education dispensation presents new challenges and opportunities for effective Social Studies education in today’s classroom environment and serves as the wake-up call of how social studies education continues to respond to the current trends, issues and instructional objectives.

Keywords: Social Studies, Integration, Implementation, Teacher Education, Fluctuations

1. Introduction

The social studies approach emphasized the holistic integration of nation building content around relevant issues and topics that included environmental concerns, population, attention to attitudes, values, beliefs and the skills of problem solving. The social studies closely models’ traditional society approach to good citizenship by organizing history, culture, values and beliefs as a formal, integrated school subject which is honored as a worthy study (Salia-Bao,1990). In this study, social studies is defined as the blending of ideas, theories, principles, generalization and knowledge from the social sciences and humanities for the purpose of helping learners to fit well into society (Kankam, 2016). It is an integrated field that draws its subject matter from the various other disciplines. The National Council for the Social Studies (1994) provided a comprehensive definition of Social Studies as:

The integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Within the school program, social studies provides coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics and the natural sciences (p.vi).

Gauging from the multidisciplinary content and child-centered pedagogical approaches, researchers conclude that social studies stands out as the most appropriate subject for citizenship education (Kankam, 2015; Mukhongo, 2010; Biesta, 2006). Brief backgrounds to the historical development of the Social Studies classroom approach can help us appreciate the arguments of the researchers.

It is necessary to study the history of a subject in order ensure better understanding on the part of teachers about subject matter content and as well aid in curriculum revision. It is on record that Social Studies education initially started in the United State of America where the Social Studies

movement was formed as a result of the influence of John Dewey (Salia-Bao, 1990). This resulted in the formation of the progressive education called the Pragmatists (Salia-Bao, 1990). They stressed the progressive philosophy which was based on child-centered education, inquiry, and discovery learning.

In Africa, when most countries were securing independence in the 1960s, there was the need for the new leaders and educationists to make changes in the education setting. Social studies became part of the school curricula after several conferences held in the United States of America, Britain and Africa. The first conference was held in 1961 at the Endicott House, Massachusetts Institute of Technology to study some of the problems of education of the emerging nations of Africa and to suggest steps by which those problems could be solved. At the Massachusetts' conference, a Sub-committee on the Humanities and Social Studies was formed (Tamakloe, 1994). They agreed on the following objectives for Social Studies:

1. To sensitize the student to his own culture, to social heritage and to the problems of developing African states and societies.
2. To induce a sharp awareness in the students of his own world and of involvement in the wider world of which he is invariably a part.
3. To develop the ability to identify and evaluate critically the economic, social, political and moral problems and situations he will face a citizen (Carnoy, 1974)

In 1967, another conference was held at Queen's College, Oxford with delegation from United State of America, Britain and Africa. The conference discussed a variety of needs and priorities in curriculum development of the African countries, particularly at primary, secondary, and teacher training level (Walter Rodney, cited in Salia-Bao, 1990).

As part of the government's policy on training teachers to teach social studies at the basic schools, social studies was introduced at the teacher training colleges in Ghana. By examining the various historical directions and translation of those influences into classroom development and classroom instruction, a glimpse into the past and the future of Social Studies, government, and citizenship ethics can be deduced. In achieving the objectives, I examined five distinct chronological periods that characterized the fluctuation and stabilization. I considered the historical periods such as the 1940s, the 1950s, the late 1960s, the 1976, the 1987 education reform committee and the current goals and purposes of social studies.

The 1940 Development

The social studies programme as a field of study was introduced into the curriculum of the teacher training colleges in Ghana as far back as the 1940s (Tamakloe, 1988; Kankam, 2001). The teaching of social studies during this period was experimented at the Presbyterian Training College (Akropong), Wesley College (Kumasi) and Achimota Training College (Accra). This experiment, according to Agyemang-Fokuo (1994) was, however, not allowed to blossom due to both teachers' and students' negative perception and attitudes towards the social studies programme.

The 1950s Development

This section of the historical development examines the perception and attitudes of both tutors and students. The way people perceive things determine their level of commitment to those things. Callahan and Kellough (1992) in their observation, pointed out that people put much effort in their activities when they see that they achieve their aim and be rewarded.

By the early 1950s, the single subjects (i.e. studying subjects like history, economics and geography separately) had taken over the integrated social studies (i.e. drawing concepts, ideas, knowledge and views from different subject areas like history and geography to solve problems or explain issues) in the teacher training colleges. The reasons advanced for the resumption of the single subjects approach, according to Tamakloe (1988), was the fact that social sciences graduates of the University of Ghana, who were to handle social studies in the teacher training colleges could not cope with the integrated approach, for they specialized in single subjects. Also, the students in the teacher training colleges welcomed the single subject approach because they perceived it as an opportunity to either improve upon their grades in the single-subjects such as history, geography and economics in School Certificate or General Certificate of Education (G.C.E.) Ordinary Level (OL) or get a firm foundation in order to try their hands at GCE “O” Level examinations.

The period of 1960

In the late 1960s, another development propelled the re-introduction of integrated social studies in the teacher training colleges in Ghana. This was when some graduate and non-graduate teachers who, had been sent to Wales and Bristol to study the “Environmental studies approach” and the “Integrated social studies” returned to Ghana. By 1971, about 14 of the teachers with positive perception about social studies had been posted to the teacher training colleges to spearhead the development of the integrated programme, which they had studied abroad.

In 1976, the experimental junior secondary schools were established where social studies was one school curriculum. There was the need for student-teachers at the teacher training colleges to specialize in social studies to teach at the experimental junior secondary schools. After training the first three batches of social studies teachers at the teacher training colleges for the programme, it was realized that there was a glut of teachers because there was no corresponding expansion of the junior secondary schools in terms of numbers. The result was that social studies had to be abandoned in the training colleges in the 1981/82 academic year (Tamakloe, 2008). There was no need for training specialist social studies teachers who could not be absorbed into the education system. This state of affairs in the training colleges of Ghana, together with the fact that social studies was not examined externally for certification, both at the teacher training colleges and secondary school levels, made tutors and students alike to develop a half-hearted attitude to the study and development of social studies.

The development of social studies in the teacher training colleges has been characterized by unsteadiness due to both tutor’s and students’ perceptions and attitudes towards the programme since its inception. It is against this background that Tamakloe (1988, p.) described the attempt at introducing social studies as one plagued with a “chequered history”.

The 1987 Education Reform

The 1987 Education Reform Review Committee was born as a result of the experimentation of some of the recommendations of the 1972 Dzobo Committee. The Review Committee Report of 1987 recommended six years of primary school, three of years junior secondary school and senior secondary school education each or the 6-3-3. The recommendation was implemented in 1987, which led to all middle schools being turned into junior secondary schools. With this new reform in education, social studies was re-introduced in the teacher training colleges as one of the elective subjects to train students to teach social studies at the junior secondary schools.

The 1987 Education Reform Programme aimed at changing the content of education at the basic level and to ensure its relevance to individual and societal needs (GES, 1987). Based on this, the New Education Reform Programme has brought in its trail social studies at the basic education level nationwide.

The aims and objectives of the junior secondary school social studies programmes reflected all the three domains of educational objective: cognitive, affective and psychomotor. The cognitive domain deals with the acquisition of knowledge, facts and ideas; the affective domain deals with the behavioural change of the learner whilst the psychomotor domain deals with the acquisition of skills (GES, 1987). The introduction of social studies at the basic education level necessitated the training of more teachers to have sound basis in the content for the courses at the junior secondary school level. Consequently, in 1990, Teacher Training Colleges in Ghana embarked on teaching of social studies after a new programme of instruction had been designed. The aims and objectives of the teacher training college social studies syllabus are to:

...help the teacher trainees to be equipped with the subject content, the professional knowledge and skills that will enable them to handle confidently the social studies programme at the basic level of education. Hence, our goal in teaching social studies in the Teacher Training Colleges should be to help students to acquire knowledge and to effect a change in their attitudes and values in their society and the environment. It is also to equip them with the skills to teach for changes in the values and attitudes of pupils (GES, 1993: 1).

The social studies programme has been perceived differently and described in various ways by many writers over the years (Martollera, 1985). Some writers like Banks (1985) and Bar, Barth and Shermis (1977) perceive social studies as a single subject and a singular noun. Wesley (1950) and the Committee on Social Studies (1976) perceive social studies as several subjects and, therefore, described as a plural noun. However, the writers in the field of social studies perceive the subject as an integrated subject because it integrates the social science subjects such as history, geography and civics for the purpose of citizenship education (Tamakloe, 1994).

It is common knowledge that the tutors and students at the teacher training colleges have different perception of the social studies programme, and, therefore, are likely to approach the subject according to how they perceive it. There are two categories of tutors teaching social studies in the teacher training colleges in Ghana. The first category consists of those tutors who graduated in the integrated social studies from either University of Cape Coast or University of Education, Winneba (Kankam, 2001). This first category of tutors studied the theory, principles and methods of teaching integrated social studies. Such tutors are likely to perceive social studies as an integrated subject with its main goal as citizenship education and, therefore, teach the subject as prescribed by the Ghana Education Service. The second category of tutors studied the separate subjects such as History, Geography, Economics and other foundation subjects of Social Studies. Such tutors are not likely to get the principles underpinning integration in Social studies. Hence, such tutors are not likely to perceive Social Studies as an integrated subject with its main focus on citizenship education. The GES (1993) prescribes that Social Studies should not be treated as separated and isolated subjects but rather as one integrated subject.

Goals and purposes of social studies

It has been established that there is an endless debate regarding the purposes and goals of social studies and how particular social goals can be achieved (Ross, 2006; Brophy, 1990). The debate, however, does not prevent the writing of the goals and purposes of social studies. The main goal of social studies has been mentioned as citizenship education which involves preparing citizens for active participation in a democracy by providing them with the essential knowledge, skills and values (Ross 2006; Haln, 2001). The National Council for Social Studies (1990) states that the basic goal of social studies education is to prepare the young people to be humane, rational, participating citizens in a world that is becoming increasingly interdependent.

The goals of social studies as given by the National Commission on Social Studies in schools' report (1989) hangs around five themes which are; (a) development of civic responsibility and citizen participation; (b) development of a global perspective through an understanding of students' life experiences as part total human experience, past and present; (c) development of 'critical understanding' of the history, geography, and the pluralistic nature of the of the civil institutions of the United States; (d) development of a multicultural perspective of the worlds' peoples through an understanding of their differences and commonalities throughout time and space; (e) development of social students' capabilities for critical thinking about 'the human conditions'.

The five goals, according to Mullins (1990), were accompanied by recommendations on the characteristics of what content should be taught in social studies and these were:

- History and Geography should be the unifying core of the social studies curriculum and should be integrated with concepts from economics, political science and social sciences
- Social studies should be taught and learned consistently and cumulatively from kindergarten through grade 12
- The curriculum should impart skills and knowledge necessary for effective citizenship in democracy
- The curriculum should balance the study of United States with studies of other cultures.
- Superficial coverage of content should be replaced with dept study of selected content (Mullins, 1990, p.1)

These goals have served as the bedrock on what social studies aims to achieve and what content knowledge should be considered. Even though educating for citizenship is the main focus of social studies, the consensus over citizenship education is fruitless as it is a highly contested area and content specific (Seara & Hughes, 2006). Marker and Melinger (1992, p.124) stressed "Behind that totem to which nearly all social studies researches pay homage lies a continuous and rancorous debate about the purposes of social studies". The debate on social studies is interminable due to the fact citizenship education itself, as used in the field, is a contested concept.

Barr, Bar and Shermis (1997) put up an insightful synthesis on social studies by suggesting competing analysis on the purpose and goals of social studies. They came out with three traditions that illustrate different approaches to social studies and these were put under content, content, purpose and method such as: Social studies taught as Citizenship Transmission: Social studies taught as Social science; Social studies as Reflective Inquiry. The citizenship transmission suggests citizenship is promoted through the inculcation of right values as guidelines for making decision. This relates to transmission of concepts and values through techniques such as textbook, recitation, lecture, question and answer sessions and structured problem solving exercises.

The second approach is taught as a social science and it is based on the grounds that citizenship is best promoted by decision-making based on the mastery of the social sciences concepts and problems. The method of teaching is based on the discovery of social science different methods. The subject matter is derived from structure, concepts and processes found in each subject and the integrated social science discipline (Barr, et al., 1997).

The third approach is that social studies is taught as reflective inquiry. Citizenship is taught via a process of inquiry. In this approach, students identify problems, ponder over them and test for some insights. Barr et al. (1977) argue that it is this self-selection that constitute the content of reflection. Researchers have pointed out that the identification of these traditions have aided in explaining the tension in the field of social studies (Thornton, 2005; Evans, 2004).

2. Conclusion

A cursory look at the historical development of social studies in Ghana concludes that the development of social studies in Ghana has characterized with a chequered history. There are periods in the development where it progresses to a higher level and eventually come down. It was the recommendation of Dzobo committee's report implemented in 1987 as a reform that stabilizes the development of social studies in Ghana. It has been established that the development of social studies is as do/ as the introduction of teacher training college in Ghana, in an experimental and informal way. It was the Mombasa Conference that laid the foundation for the understanding of the meaning of social studies and an application of social studies in Africa.

3. Implication

It was essential that whenever a programme is to be introduced the concept and attitudes of recipient should be sought first, else it will be introduced but the learners will not participate in it. These attitudinal gaps created dissatisfaction among students at the then colleges of education.

Again, it has been established that teachers trained in single subject areas from the University of Ghana lack the multidisciplinary orientation to teaching social studies as an integrated subject. This suggests that policy makers should put the cart before the horse in matters of curricula. Teachers must be given the needed orientation in the skills of integration. The teacher must accept that the world around us must be viewed as a whole.

The teachers of social studies must understand the expanding environments theory of mental development and that the course content might be organized in "scope and sequence that spiral concepts themes, life problems and issues throughout the social studies curriculum. With this orientation, teachers will appreciate the concept of integration for its sustainability.

Lessons must be learned from the 1960s development in promoting social studies. It was noticed that the teachers who trained from Wales and Bristol supported social studies development. A clue from this is that teachers must be engaged in continuous training and orientation for them to perform as expected. We must make use of the teachers we train when they have graduated. Without job placement, they will feel demotivated and that will not encourage others to follow.

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