

## Promoting the Effective Teaching and Learning of Social Studies through the Use of Mastery Learning Strategies in the 21st Century

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**Abstract.** Social studies as a subject is of a fairly recent origin through the world. The subject deals with man's interaction with his environment and how the environment equally influences man. Social studies as a discipline involve the teaching of values, norms and good attitude for the survival of the individual in the society. While interacting with his physical and social environment man encounter problems and challenges in his quest to live comfortably, orderly and meaningfully. Incidentally the programme of social studies in schools has been implemented for many years without success in terms of inculcating the right values of good citizenship among the youths. It is assumed that this deficiency arises from the way the subject is been taught and learnt in the classrooms. The study attempts to look at how social studies can be effectively taught in schools through master learning strategies and effective evaluation. We believe that if this study is properly followed and implemented, we are bound to achieve maximum learning of social studies in our schools.

### 1. Introduction

The recent socio- political and economic changes in the world and within nations have brought about changes in educational goals and greater challenges for social studies. The schools are called not only to equip the learner with basic knowledge of social studies content but also with higher cognitive skills, such as problem solving and thinking skills that allow for self-development and continuous learning. To meet up with these challenges, there is a movement away from the behaviourist method of direct teaching such as in the lecture method, note copying and dictations, where the learner is given contents to memorize and regurgitate.

Social Studies as a discipline continues to enjoy changes in educational objectives. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, History, Economics, Government and Geography were taught as separate subjects with a listed series of facts to be memorised. With changes in educational outcomes student's learning had to be reconsidered and taught as integrated discipline. Emphasis is now shifted from learning as an acquisition of facts to learning as utilization of facts; from learning as memorization (from geography and history texts), to learning as a process of discovering important relationships and principles inductively; from learning for learning sake to learning as a way of inquiry and thinking according to the processes of the Social Sciences. This can only be achieved through the process of mastery learning strategy Onibokun, 1999).

### 1.1 History of Social Studies in Nigeria

Social studies as a subject is of a fairly recent origin throughout the world. The concept of social studies was first developed in USA in 1916 by the committee on social studies of the commission on the reorganization of secondary education of the National Education Association (Jarolimek, 1977). Later in 1930s social studies was introduced into Europe especially in Great Britain due to unprecedented enthusiasm to reform the conventional curriculum to meet up with the demands of the society. From 1950 to 1956, the subject had spread to many African Countries. The new independent nations of Africa were faced with how to re-order their national policies to enable them perform their expected roles as independent nations within the world community of nations. The development of social studies in secondary schools in Nigeria gained momentum from the year 1977 after the introduction of National

Policy on Education popularly known as the 6-3-3-4 system. This rapid progress was caused by two major factors. The first was that the Universal Primary Education (UPE) introduced in 1976 made social studies the only social science subject to be taught in the primary schools. The second factor was that social studies was made a core subject for the junior secondary school. This has brought a lot of awareness to the students and the teachers on the significant roles of social studies especially as it affects the implementation of 6-3-3-4 system of education.

In order to implement the new national policy on education, government at all levels became more interested in the schooling process in terms of educational outcome, learning activities, instructional resources, instructional strategies and evaluation procedures. In view of this, emphasis has been on the need to:

- Make educational activities center on the learner for maximum self-development and self-fulfillment.
- Structure the educational system to develop the practice of self-learning (FRN, 2004). The implication of these for classroom teachers is that, they should develop a teaching approach which encourages the learners to participate in the learning processes.

Despite the efforts of Government in restructuring the educational system to develop the practice of self-learning, it is to be noted that the dominant approach to instruction in schools has been the expository type especially since the inception of western education in Nigeria in 1843. Other methods of instruction were later introduced into the learning processes. For instance, since 1960, curriculum planners have emphasized the inquiry approach by claiming that carrying out investigations is the most promising method by which students will master inquiry skills and become literate in social studies (Schwab, 1963; Yager & Lutz, 1994). Even at that, it cannot be said that schools have done well in developing such skills in the learners

## 1.2 The Goal of Social Studies

Social Studies as a school subject introduced by the Federal Government was to help students acquire social basic knowledge, positive attitudes, values and social skills needed to make the students functional and responsible citizens and contributing members of the society. It provides knowledge, skills and attitude that enable learners understand their physical and social environment in order to act or behave as

responsible citizens. It prepares students to live in a global and culturally diverse world, as well as keep pace with rapid development in electronically and technologically changing world, (Martorella, 1996). It involves person with group and group with group. It is a study of man's relationship with his environment, how environment affects man and how man in turn influences his environment.

The teaching of social studies is therefore an activity that involves both the teacher and the learner. The purpose of teaching is to ensure that learning takes place. While learning involves a behavioural change in the learner, social studies teaching involves the transmission of the relevant body of knowledge, attitudes, manner, dispositions, skills and values that enable the individual to survive in a growing and dynamic society.

Adeyemi (2007) defines teaching of social studies as a process of facilitating student learning through a proper management by the teacher of the inter-relationships among the students' interest, the content for learning and the methods and materials he or she intends to use in the teaching and learning of the content materials. It may involve giving instruction to somebody on knowledge, skills and attitudes with the intention that the person will be able to know the information or to do something or act in a particular way that is compatible with the instruction. We know that the person the instruction is given to may be a learner, a pupil, a student or a trainee. The means employed by the teacher to pass information to the learner would determine ultimately, if he or she is teaching.

It should be noted that the knowledge of social studies is imparted through good technique and one makes sure that the learner has gained something useful which can make his/her experience relatively permanent, that is only when one can say that learning has taken place, whether the method is adequate or not is another factor. Right from time past, the conventional method of imparting social studies knowledge has been in use. The relevance of this conventional method and its attendant criticism are what have been giving educators a major concern and making them to think of other better techniques of imparting knowledge. Many techniques have been propounded by educators put of which is mastery

## 2. Achieving the effective teaching and learning of social studies through mastery learning strategies

Mastery Learning is an instructional method that presumes that all children can learn if they are

provided with the appropriate learning conditions. Specifically, mastery learning is a method whereby students are not allowed to advance to a subsequent learning objective until they demonstrate proficiency in the current one.

Mastery Learning curricula generally consist of distinct separate topics which all students begin together. Students who do not satisfactorily complete a topic are given additional instruction until they succeed. Students who do not master the topic early engage in enrichment activities until the entire class can progress together. Mastery Learning includes many elements of successful tutoring. In a mastery learning environment, the teacher directs a variety of group-based instructional techniques, with frequent and specific feedback by using diagnostic, formative test, as well as regularly correcting mistakes students make along their learning path (Coikszentminalyi, 1997).

According to Lynn, Douglas and Gerald (2009), Mastery Learning is an instructional process that provides students with multiple opportunities to demonstrate content mastery. Initial instruction is presented at a fast pace to engage all learners. Students who do not demonstrate mastery are given additional instruction specifically designed to correct their misunderstandings. Re-teaching should involve strategies that are different from the original instructional methods. For example, if the original material was presented in a lecture format with visuals, the re-teaching process might involve hands-on activities and cooperative learning strategies. A retest is later given to these students to allow them to demonstrate mastery.

It was Carroll (1963) that first came out with the idea of mastery learning. Carroll studied individual differences in the learning of second languages and found that scores reflected differences in the amount of time needed for learning rather than difference in the amount that can be learnt. He concluded that virtually all students can achieve mastery of learning task if each is given enough time and if they all receive good instruction. His ideas were improved upon by Bloom (1968) when he came up with Learning for Mastery (LFM). In the same year, Keller (1968) also improved on the ideas of Bloom. Keller (1968) came up with Personalized System of Instruction (PSI).

Both Carroll's and Bloom's model are group based mastery learning techniques while Keller's model is personalized. Bloom's model, therefore has been viewed as the partial mastery learning technique

while that of Keller is seen as the full mastery learning model because there is little difference from that of Bloom in that it is totally individual based and advocates 100% performance. The concepts of both partial mastery learning technique and full mastery learning technique, therefore, are the same. It is only in the aspect of execution of their techniques that differences come to play.

Mastery learning technique is a strategy of teaching and learning exercise expected to bring all or almost all students to a level of mastery in the learning of any particular subject of choice. Adepoju (2002) looks at mastery learning as "an innovation in which its various forms are designed towards making learners perform well on an academic task. In mastery learning, a pre-specified criterion level of performance is established which students must master in order to complete the instruction and move on. It typically includes frequent assessment of students' progress, provision of corrective instruction and emphasis on cues, participation, feedback and reinforcements.

In fact, one of the widely used means of adapting instruction to the needs of diverse students is called mastery learning (Block and Anderson, 1975; Block and Burns, 1976; Bloom, 1976). The basic idea behind mastery learning is to make sure that all or almost all students have learned a particular skill to a pre-established level of mastery before moving on to the next skill.

The process of Mastery Learning involves a good quality of instruction, the teacher employs the best form of instruction that is suitable for the group and needs to pay attention to each student to ensure he is coping, this process leads him to know the students that are slow and that need individual attention or extra assignments to help them attain mastery of the subject matter (Onuka, 1999). It also portends group study where the more knowledgeable is available to help the slow learner. However, a balance must be struck to ensure that the fast learner is not unnecessarily slowed down to his detriment. This group study portends cooperative learning; Tutorial group is another characteristic of learning for mastery. Here, the tutor must not necessarily be the class teacher; it is in fact better handled by someone else.

Also, assignment should be given to students ahead of introducing a subject matter by way of referring them to the relevant portion of the textbooks and other instructional materials. They can also be made to do some tasks in work-books where they are

available to help their understanding on the subject matter. Further, the teacher may also need to give frequent reinforcement to some of the student/audio-visual aids and academic games which ensure the learning of a particular idea through illustration and graphic explanation as they are very important instructional aids in the use of learning for mastery strategy. Other means of reinforcement of social studies instruction include the use of film-strips and short motion pictures which can be used by the individual students.

The teacher must be an effective communicator who thoroughly processes his information of social studies content and presents it in an orderly and comprehensive manner. There must be an established feedback mechanism so as to enable correction of lapses in instructional methods which can thus bring about improvement in the teaching and learning of Social Studies.

Summarily, to instruct for mastery the following guideline are to be followed:

- Clearly state the objectives representing the purpose of the subject
- The curriculum is divided into relatively small learning units, each with modelling, practice, formative evaluation; re-teaching, reinforcement, and summative evaluation included,
- Each unit is preceded by brief diagnostic tests, formative assessments.
- The results of formative tests are used to provide supplementary instruction, or corrective activities to help the learner overcome problems.

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### 3. Evaluation

The National Policy on Education (2004) emphasizes that evaluation -should be done through continuous assessment. Assessment is the process of organizing test data into interpretable forms on a number of factors. Data are obtained using a wide variety of instruments, such as tests, questionnaires and observations. In general, several tests of different types and testing different-aspects of the child's learning (cognitive, psychomotor, and effective) are needed in order to complete an assessment. Thus one can compare assessment with a series of medical tests. That is, assessment of learning focuses on important factors and a number of measurement methods or techniques in order to arrive at a mark, or judgment in respect of the pupil's ability, attitude and progress in a particular subject. Such multi-dimensional approaches may include tests, interviews, projects or homework assignments<sup>A</sup> etc (NTI, 2007). According to Urevbu (2001), there are two major types of evaluation formative and summative evaluation.

#### 3.1 Summative Evaluation

This is evaluation conducted at the completion of the curriculum development process and provides a terminal judgement on the completed product. 'Summative evaluation, (hence) deals primarily with intents, observations and judgements on the (intended) outcomes'.

The perspectives portrayed in formative and summative evaluation are not necessarily wrong, but they are necessarily limited and incomplete. Both forms of evaluation as they are currently practised give only a partial perspective on the worth of educational events. In the main, both formative and summative evaluation has tended to be quite conservative with regard to existing institutional structures of education. What makes a theory conservative (or radical) is its posture toward the institutions of its surrounding society. A theory is conservative to the extent that it treats these institutions as given and unchangeable in essentials; proposes remedies for them so that they work better, rather than devising alternatives to them; foresees no future that can be essentially better than the present

conditions that already exist; and explicitly or implicitly, counsels acceptance or resignation to what exists, rather than struggling against it.

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper examines the effective teaching and learning of social studies through the use of mastery learning strategies. Social studies as a subject introduced by the federal government of Nigeria was to help students acquire values and social skills needed to make the student functional and responsible citizens and contributory members of the society. It provides knowledge skills and attitude that enable learners understand their physical environment in order to act or behave as responsible citizens. It prepares students to live in a global and culturally diverse world as well as keep pace with rapid development in a dynamic world.

Other methods of teaching social studies such as programmed instruction, individualized, computer assisted instruction, the use of information and communication technology etc are also applicable in social studies teaching. These have not been emphasized in this paper.

We must admit that effective teaching makes a huge demand on male and female teachers, time and effort except one resolutely decided to make teaching of social studies effective there are some major constraints that can act as stumbling blocks, such as the effort, time etc. however, these constraints must be resisted and redirected.

One of the ways we can contribute to the development of our nation is to impact social studies knowledge and value on the younger generation who are the leaders of tomorrow through mastery learning strategies.

Mastery learning strategies will help to propagate social studies from generation to generation by helping to promote good values, attitudes, knowledge and skills for the survival of the individual and the nation. Social studies teachers are the major stakeholders and we must uphold this in all ramifications, especially in our teaching.

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