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TEACHING SOCIAL STUDIES FROM MULTICULTURAL PERSPECTIVES: A PRACTICAL APPROACH FOR SOCIETAL CHANGE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Currently, global education and global citizenship for social transformation addresses the issues of cordial and harmonious existence of our time. The roots to challenge bias prejudice and creating classroom environments that reflects the learner's culture for national unity lies in multiculturalism. Multicultural education is a system of instruction which attempts to foster cultural pluralism and acknowledges the differences between race and culture in order to promote societal change and orderliness. Nigeria is a multilingual and multicultural state with about 513 languages spoken; therefore introduction of multicultural approach in teaching will ensure effective socialization and transformative education in Nigeria. This paper therefore brings to light the fact that multicultural education is relevant because the diversity of students in our schools today. This work outlined strategies which can be used in helping students from diverse racial, cultural, ethnic and language groups to experience academic success. While academic knowledge and skills are essential, students must also develop the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to interact positively in our diverse nation. A commitment by educators to multicultural education will bring us closer to this goal.

Key Words: Teaching Social Studies, Societal Change.

Introduction

Multicultural education is a set of strategies and materials in education that were developed to assist teachers to promote democracy while responding to the many issues created by rapidly changing demographics of their students (Banks, 2008). Multicultural education maintains that all students should have equal opportunities to learn regardless of racial, ethnic social-class or gender group to which they belong.

The historical roots of multicultural education lie in the civil rights movement of various historically oppressed groups. According to Davidman (1997), the history of multicultural education can be traced back to the social action African Americans and other people of colour who challenged discriminatory practices in public institutions during the civil rights struggles of the 1960s. Activists, community leaders and parents called for curricular reform in educational institutions and instead of re-examination of hiring practices. Also, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the woman's rights movement joined this push for education reform. Women's right group challenged inequalities in employment and educational opportunities as well as income, identifying multicultural education as a progressive approach for social transformation.

In the face of these struggles, James Banks, one of the pioneers of multicultural education examined schools as social systems from multicultural context, He opined that in order to maintain a "multicultural school environment", all aspects of the school had to be examined and transformed, including policies, teachers, attitudes, instructional materials, assessment methods, counseling and teaching styles. It is therefore very certain that multicultural education advocates the belief that students and their life histories and experiences should be placed at the center of the teaching and learning process.

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Multiculturalism in Africa

The cultural diversity of Africa has long been recognized. These differences are gender, age, language, culture, race, sexual identity and income level to mention a few. Audrey Richards, for example provided a detailed account of linguistics, religious and cultural differentiation of communities in East Africa in a book entitled *The Multicultural State of East Africa*. One of the contested concepts in multiculturalism is assimilation; an example from Ethiopia provides a unique insight into this policy. Assimilation implies the eradication of difference in favour of the dominant culture thereby promoting cultural superiority which multiculturalism seeks to oppose.

Nigeria is also a multilingual and multicultural state therefore multilingual and multicultural education programs are a necessary element in today's schools. According to Banks(1993), the ever increasing numbers of immigrants from all over the world require a continued demand for teachers with skills to work with limited English proficient students. The position of the Nigerian Government is made clear in the N.P.E (2004) 4th edition that the language of environment shall be taught as (L1) where it was orthography and literature. Where it does not have, it shall be taught with emphasis on orality as (L2). This is called indigenous language policy which attempts to give recognition to and actualize the multicultural approach for effective socialization. Finally, multiculturalism plays a major role in education and nation building, de-ethnizing the population with an aim of constructing a unitary conception of the nation.

People in a heterogeneous society such as Nigeria are characterized by groups, class, beliefs, attitudes, values, interests and intentions. These diversities however have been positively harnessed for greatness by other nations of the world but the case is quite different in Nigeria due inadequate knowledge of multicultural education. This is despite the fact that our heroes past have long realized this as far back as the twilight of independence when they sang in our national anthem, thou tribes and tongues may differ in brotherhood we stand. Therefore, teaching with a multicultural perspective will encourage appreciation and understanding of other cultures as well as one's own. Teaching with multicultural strategies promotes the child's sense of uniqueness of his own culture as a positive characteristic and enables the child to accept the uniqueness of the culture of others.

Goals of Multicultural Education

According to the National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME), the goals of multicultural education are as follows:

- Creating a safe, accepting and successful learning environment for all.
- Increasing awareness of global issues.
- Strengthening cultural consciousness.
- Strengthening intercultural awareness.
- Teaching students that there are multiple historical perspectives.
- Encouraging critical thinking in multicultural perspective.
- Preventing prejudice and discrimination.
- Creating the ability to work and live with a multicultural perspective
- Developing respect and appreciation for culturally different people.
- To eliminate culturally assaultive classrooms.

The Need for A Multicultural Curriculum

- * To prepare students for diverse work places and multicultural environment.
- * To expose biases, stereotypes and politics that can restrict achievement.
- * Content is fair, accurate and inclusive.

- * Accommodates diverse teaching and learning styles for teachers and students.
- * Help students, faculty and staff to become advocates multicultural awareness.
- * Expanding curriculum to include a variety of different groups.
- * To provide students with a more wholistic understanding of subject areas.

The seven basic characteristics of multicultural education

- ❖ Multicultural education is antiracist education
- ❖ Multicultural education is basic education
- ❖ Multicultural education is important for all students
- ❖ Multicultural education is pervasive
- ❖ Multicultural education is social justice
- ❖ Multicultural education is a process
- ❖ Multicultural education is critical pedagogy” (Nieto, S. (1996)

Classroom today are becoming increasingly diverse. Teachers must consider not only race and ethnicity, but also issues such as gender, substance abuse, homophobia, teen pregnancy, and homelessness.

Racial Demography of Classrooms

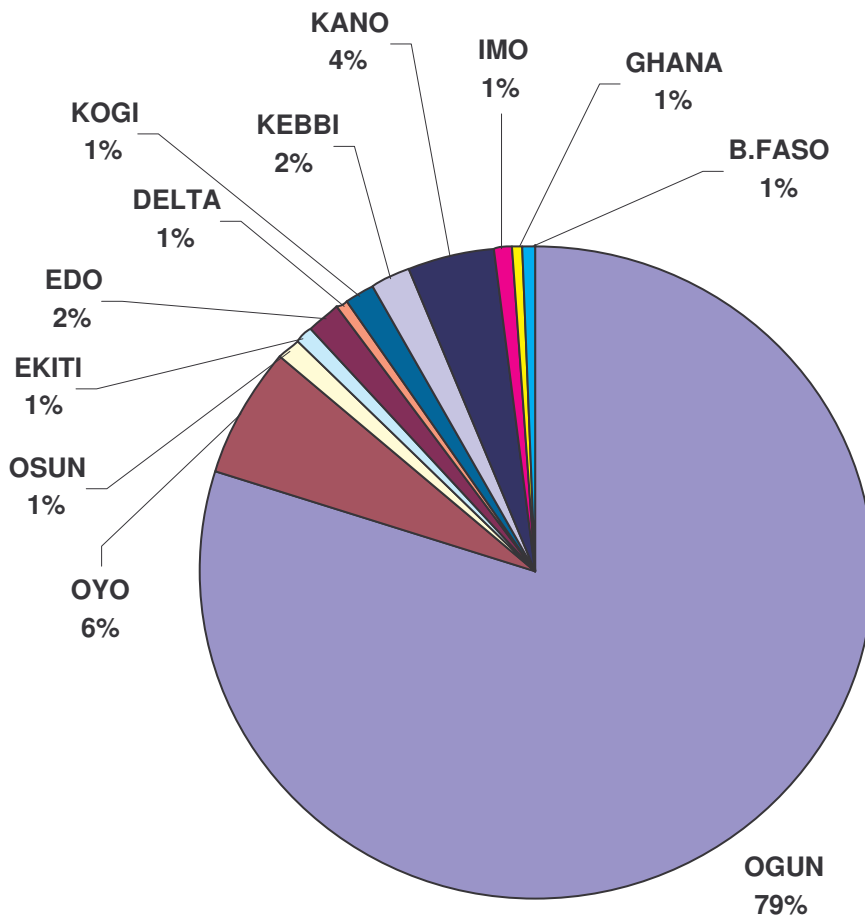
In virtually every school, one is likely to find students from a variety of racial composition and this variety is increasing everyday(Valdez,1999).Therefore, teachers in contemporary classroom must reexamine their curricula and instructional strategies to meet the needs of these students. For example, Shade, Kelly and Oberg (1997), Ladson-Billings (1990) and many other scholars have called upon educators to create “culturally responsive” classrooms that can help students understand and negotiate differences across culture. Teachers in culturally responsive classroom emphasize that students must learn to become pluralistic in thought, behaviour and affect. Teachers must ask questions that promote higher level thinking about multicultural topics, concepts, issues and groups. Hence learning experiences that promote cultural empathy are encouraged.

The racial demography of two junior secondary schools conducted in a recent study as displayed below shows that today’s classrooms are very different from classrooms of a decade ago because they are classrooms of unparallel diversity. Students in these classrooms according to the table differ in terms of race, tribes, language, beliefs, culture and many other variables. Similarly, by focusing on multicultural content, concepts and issues, minority students are opportuned to see themselves reflected in the curriculum. A multicultural approach also gives other students ongoing opportunities to see culturally diverse students reflected in the curriculum. Consequently, multicultural education would help the students develop their decision- making abilities, promote values, attitudes and behaviours that supports ethnic pluralism and cultural diversity. Therefore, a multicultural perspective geared towards social participation and political efficacy is vital for socially democratic nation like Nigeria.

Table showing Racial Demography Of a multi-cultural Classroom in Abeokuta (Olumo High School):

STATES	OGUN	OYO	OSUN	EKITI	EDO	DELTA	KEBBI	KANO	IMO	GHANA	B.FASO	TOTAL
JSS 3A	43	5	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	50
JSS 3B	38	4	2	0	3	0	1	2	0	1	1	54
JSS 3C	48	1	0	0	0	0	2	5	1	0	0	57
TOTAL	129	10	2	1	3	1	3	7	1	1	1	161

Title: Chart showing the Racial Demography of a multi-cultural Classroom in Abeokuta

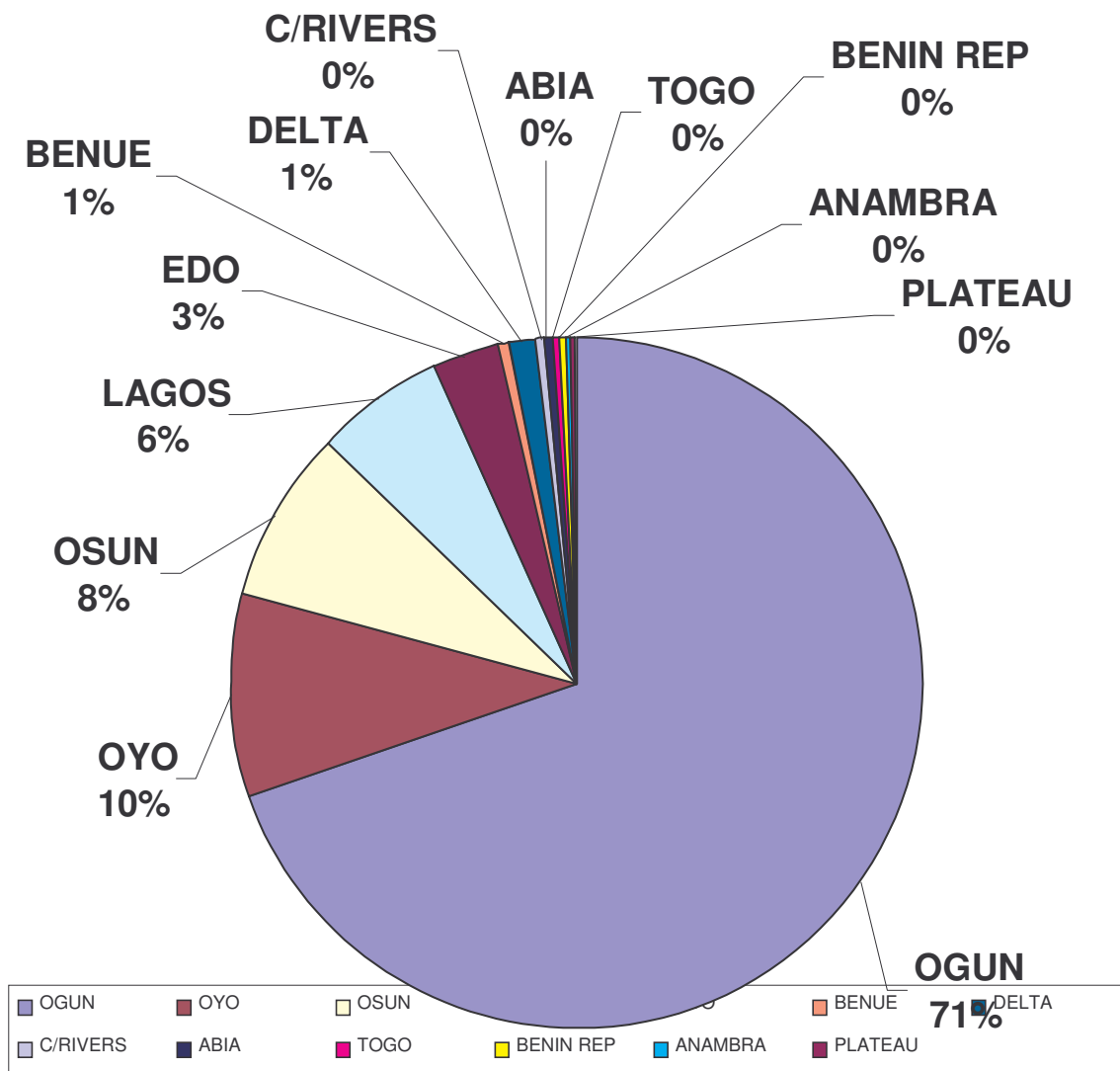


LEGENDS



Table Showing Racial Demography of a multi-cultural Classroom in Abeokuta (Gateway Secondary School)

JSS 3A	30	5	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	43
JSS 3B	35	7	4	2	2	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	54	
JSS 3C	28	5	5	7	3	0	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	52	
JSS 3D	40	3	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	51	
JSS 3E	36	4	6	5	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	53	
JSS 3F	48	6	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	56	
JSS 3G	35	5	4	3	2	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	52	
JSS 3H	30	4	3	3	2	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	44	
TOTAL	282	39	32	25	12	3	4	2	2	1	1	1	1	405	



Curriculum Guidelines for Multicultural Education

The National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) has created some of the following curriculum guidelines for multicultural education which are summarized below:

1. Ethnic and cultural diversity should permeate the total school environment.

2. School policies and procedures should foster positive multicultural interactions and understandings among students, teachers and the support of staff.
3. Schools should have systematic, comprehensive mandatory and continuing staff development programs.
4. The multicultural curriculum should provide students with continuous opportunities to develop a better sense of self.
5. The multicultural curriculum should students develop the skills necessary for effective interpersonal, interethnic and intercultural group interactions.
6. Interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches should be used in designing and implementing the multicultural curriculum.
7. The multicultural curriculum should use comparative approaches in the study of ethnic and cultural groups.
8. Students should provide opportunities for students to participate in the aesthetic experiences of various ethnic and cultural groups.
9. The multicultural curriculum should provide opportunities for students to study ethnic group languages as legitimate communication systems and help them develop full literacy in at least two languages.
10. Schools should conduct ongoing, systematic evaluation of the goals, methods and instructional materials used in teaching about ethnic and cultural diversity.

Approaches to Multicultural Curriculum Reform

The process of transforming a multicultural curriculum may include participation in seminar or workshops, examination of current course content, and may necessitate personal examination and alterations. Advocates of multicultural education offer many suggestions on how it can be accomplished in school practice. Christine Bennet, James Banks, Ricardo Garcia, Sonia Nieto, Geneva Gay, Christine Sleeter, Carl Grant, and Margaret Gibson are among the leaders in the field who have developed models for implementing multicultural education. These models start with the simplest techniques and proceed to more complex ones. For example, Banks (1993) identifies four approaches to multicultural education and they include:

The Contributions Approach

This approach is incorporated by selecting books and activities that celebrate holidays, heroes, and special events from various cultures. For example, spending time reading about Dr. Martin Luther King in January. In this approach, culturally diverse books

and issues are not specified as part of the curriculum (Banks, 1999). Teachers at this stage “celebrate” difference by integrating information or resources about famous people and the cultural artifacts of various groups into the mainstream curriculum.

The Additive Approach

In this approach content, concepts, themes and perspectives are added to the curriculum without changing its basic structure. This involves incorporating literature by and about people from diverse cultures into the mainstream curriculum without changing the curriculum. Teachers must simulate a classroom environment that is decorated with prints and visual labels in each of the languages spoken. Concept taught in class should be explored through art, play, music, drawing (Drew 2009). Encouraging students to recognize their values, feelings, privileges and biases can facilitate development of self awareness.

The Transformation Approach

All this level the Eurocentric nature of the curriculum is actually changed so that the students can view events and issues from global perspective (Sadker & Sadker, 2002). All subjects must be taught from diverse perspective, voices of all students in the classroom must be included and the perception that only great literatures are derived from the United State and England must be debunked (Goski, 2000).

The Social Action

The fourth level is the social action which combines the transformation approach with activities to strive for social change. At this level, students are encouraged to make decisions and take actions related to the concepts, issues or problems they have studied (NEA Today, 2000). Thus, teaching with a multicultural perspective encourages application and understanding of other cultures as well as one's own (Dixon and Fraser, 1986). In addition, important social issues including racism, sexism and economic injustice are addressed explicitly as part of the curriculum. Students themselves becoming yet another multicultural classroom resource because voices, ideas and perspectives of students regarding these and other topics are brought to the fore in learning experience.

Despite the approaches to a multicultural curriculum reform, multicultural learning activities are most effective when they offer student opportunities to observe and participate in the affairs of the community (Jones 1986). Students should engage in direct and active learning and instructors too directly to the concerns of the students thereby creating room for positive student/teacher inter-personal relationship. Teachers should use a broad range of instructional materials and offer a scope and sequence that is developmentally based. Finally, teachers must evaluate and document what has been learnt using tests, demonstrations, surveys and other assessment methods.

Types of Multicultural Education Programs

As of the early 2000s, there is no universally agreed upon multicultural curriculum according to Hanley, (2002). He opined that in spite of this, multicultural education can be divided into three different categories:

- **Content-Focused:** The overall objective is to include subject matter in the curriculum about various cultural groups in order to enhance students' knowledge about these groups. Content may include holiday celebration, recognizing heroes, focusing on achievements of women and minorities e.t.c.
- **Student-Focused:** Here programs are specifically designed to address the academic needs of defined group of students, usually minorities. Student-Focused programs can take many forms, including efforts to draw on culturally-based learning styles and bilingual programs.
- **Socially Focused:** These programs seek to reduce bias and increase cultural and racial tolerance. Also. Programs are designed to increase contact among different races and cultures and teachers who are members of minorities encouraged. Educators make efforts to integrate other perspectives into the curriculum by celebrating cultural holidays and highlighting famous individuals from non-dominant groups. All these activities draw attention to the fact that the society is shaped by multiple perspectives.

Multicultural Perspectives and societal change in Nigeria

Multicultural education is a school reform movement that arose out of civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Banks & Banks 1999). Hence it acknowledges that schools are essential to laying the foundation for the transformation of society and elimination of oppression and injustice. So, heterogeneous grouping and grouping with different ethnicities together is an excellent way for students to feel more comfortable around each other. This will enable students learn more about a person and understand that they may be different but are still just like them.

It is extremely important that teachers learn how to recognize, honor and incorporate the personal abilities of students into their teaching strategies (Gay, 2000). Some students are better auditory learners and some learn better with the use of visual aids hence must decorate classroom with prints, and visual labels in each of the languages spoken in the classroom (Drew, 2009). Concepts taught should be explored through art, play, music and drawing because creativity in learning is key.

From the day a child is born, they are raised into the cultures of their parents (Valdez, 1999). A child is taught their native language, cultural beliefs, ways of dressing, eating and speaking and possess many other different cultural aspect. So, teachers must support the child's use of home language and integrate the language into classroom activities. The traditions of each child should be learnt, e.g. holidays celebration, birthdays, favorite food, family traditions, how are they parented? Children should

be encouraged to ask questions because it will help them to understand more about others from different backgrounds.

The appropriate use of textbooks and other instructional materials is extremely important in providing multicultural education. According to Sadker & Sadker, (2002) teachers need to recognize subtle as well as blatant forms of bias such as invisibility, stereotyping, selectivity and imbalance, unreality, fragmentation and isolation.

Another critical ingredient for a teacher's success in implementing a culturally diverse classroom is the ability to add a multicultural perspective into curriculum planning and classroom management skills. A multiculturally-informed and sensitive teacher needs to help students view film as well as other media production from diverse cultural, ethnic and gender perspectives.

Children's Easels should be implemented into the classrooms. This will help with the ever growing class size and provide options for classroom layout thereby helping in optimizing space for more effective learning and creativity. They are better platform for the making of art and help heighten awareness and attention for visual arts education. Consequently, a multicultural program will help children understand and work well with others as they grow and mature.

Multicultural education is a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students. It challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts and affirms the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, and gender, among others) that students, their communities, and teachers represent. Multicultural education permeates the curriculum and instructional strategies used in schools, as well as the interactions among teachers, students, and parents, and the very way that schools conceptualize the nature of teaching and learning. Because it uses critical pedagogy as its underlying philosophy and focuses on knowledge, reflection, and action (praxis) as the basis for social change, multicultural education promotes the democratic principles of social justice.

Conclusion

Multicultural education is being implemented widely in the nation's schools colleges and universities. The large number of national conferences, school workshops and teacher education courses in multicultural education are evidence of its success and perceived importance. Although the process of integration of content is so often contentious, textbooks publishers are also integrating ethnic and cultural contents into their books and the pace of such integration is increasing (Banks, (2003).

Multicultural education is part of a greater plan to support togetherness through education, urging people of different origins and different bloods to acknowledge cultural identity as a means to transform society. Therefore, education is the foundation on which future generation will help guide society into another age of enlightenment. (Wiedeman, 2002). This paper has outlined strategies which would incorporate social equity into our communities, homes and especially our schools through multicultural education.

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