

## THE USE OF SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION AS A TOOL FOR DEVELOPING RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AND PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE: A STUDY ON COLLEGES OF EDUCATION IN KADUNA STATE, NIGERIA

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**Abstract:** This article reports on the impact of teaching and learning of social studies education on religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence among students in colleges of education in Kaduna state. Participants were drawn from the Federal College of Education Zaria and College of Education, Gidan Waya in Kaduna state, Nigeria. The study was aimed at evaluating the knowledge of social studies students' and their perceptions on religious tolerance. Participants responded to a test before and after instructional sessions, in which they indicated the level of their awareness on social studies concepts, perceptions on religious conflicts and the importance of social studies in solving this religious conflict. The data gathered from both pretest and posttest were analyzed using analysis of variance at 95% ( $P < 0.05$ ) significance level. The data revealed that the knowledge of social studies education had significant positive impact on the attitude and perception of students on religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence. The findings highlight the critical importance of using social studies education to solve the present and future occurrences of religious conflicts in Nigeria.

**Key Words:** Education, Social Studies, Religious Conflict, Tolerance, Attitude, Perception.

### INTRODUCTION:

There is a growing need to seek other approaches to the solution of religious unrest in the nation in view of the apparent failure of religious dialogue, preaching, seminars and workshops. Religion has become a determining factor in various aspects of the nation; it exposes a great need for teachings on tolerance and peaceful coexistence. Nigeria is richly endowed with human resources, which if adequately harnessed can be useful for maximum contribution to national development. However, many factors seem to militate against harnessing the full potential of these resources for positive development. Religious conflicts in the nation, especially in the northern parts have posed a threat to meaningful development and have also led to loss of several lives and properties.

Social studies in Nigeria came as an answer to specific national problems in the late 1960s. According to the National Education Research and Development Council (2003), social studies as a school subject was intended to enable the Nigerian child to develop the spirit of patriotism, tolerance, cooperation, unity for the progress and development of the Nigerian society. Social studies education by nature is anti-thesis of destruction, disunity, intolerance and religious conflict. Social studies champions the course of de-emphasizing less those things which might widen the gaps between individuals within a country, while emphasizing more strongly the paths that create unity, tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

The school is a training ground where different cultures and religion are found. In three international studies, students' level of political tolerance has been associated with their perception of an open classroom climate, one in which they feel free and secure to express their ideas and opinions (Haln 1998; Torney-Purta, Rainer, Hans and Wolfram 2001). Avery (1992:pp. 183-201), opined that when students see that their teachers are interested in multiple perspectives, when they feel their own ideas are respected, and when they regularly listen to different views points, they become more tolerant of diverse beliefs. This therefore supports the use of students of colleges of education for this study..

There is so much doubt about the relevance of social studies as a mere school subject, which is because many people are ill equipped with adequate knowledge of its potentials. Such views are held perhaps because there are

very few empirical data on the impact of social studies education in solving problems related to conflicts and intolerance. This study is aimed at assessing the impact of social studies education on religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence. Teachers are indispensable to any educational system; and as a matter of fact, no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers, (“Federal Republic of Nigeria”, 2004). The statutory responsibility for teacher education in Nigeria today is vested in Colleges of Education. The Policy makes it mandatory for all teachers in Nigeria to be trained and stipulate Nigeria Certificate of Education (NCE) as the minimum qualification to the profession.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS:**

The research design adopted for the study was quasi-experimental pre-test and post-test group design. An intact group of 180 students were used for the study. A questionnaire was used to test students before and after interactive sessions which were held to explore concepts in social studies that were relevant for religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence. The items in the questionnaire covered relevance of social studies, love, co-operation, tolerance and acceptance of each other as viable tools for building peaceful religious coexistence among students. The response options were strongly agreed, agree, disagree and strongly disagree with a ranking of 4, 3, 2, and 1, respectively. After the pre-test, the respondents were exposed to interactive sessions, during which they were taught topics related to social studies, its relevance and relationship to religious tolerance. This study was driven by the hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the knowledge of students on social studies and their attitudes to, and perceptions on religious tolerance at pre-test and post-test. The post test was a repetition of the previously administered questionnaires to the students after they had undergone educational sessions on religious conflicts and tolerance

Significant variations in mean responses from all test groups were analyzed using one way analysis of variance (ANOVA). Where significant differences existed, they were separated using the Tukey’s HSD post hoc test. All analyses were done at 95% ( $P < 0.05$ ) significance level. All statistical analyses were done using SPSS version 17 for windows.

## **RESULTS:**

The statement of respondents indicates that 76 % respondents at pre-test agreed with the statement 1, which states that “Nigeria should adopt social studies education to solve religious conflicts”. While at the post test this value increased significantly to 99% of respondents strongly agreeing with the same statement at post test. This shows that at post-test, a significant change can be observed in the response of respondents, which can easily be tied to the teaching respondents were exposed to after pre-test. Seventy seven percent of the respondents strongly disagreed with the statement that “social studies cannot be used as a tool for solving religious problems and encourage peaceful co-existence” at pre-test, while at post –test all the respondents disagreed with the statement. Also 78% respondents strongly agreed with the statement 3 on “the vacuum the eradication of social studies from the school curriculum will create in the development of Nigeria” at pre-test. However, at the post test just as was seen in statement 1 and 2, 99% respondents also agreed with the statement at post test. At pre-test 93% respondents agreed with statement 4 which states that “social studies education is aimed at making a man adjust to his environment both physically, socially and religiously”, while 99% at post test accepted the statement. These responses are not unexpected as it attest to the fact that social studies as a problem-solving discipline deals with practical issues that affects man in the environment he/she finds him/herself to be able to adjust and function; and that social studies as a problem-solving discipline deals with practical issues that affects man in the environment he/she finds him/herself to be able to adjust and function.

This statement shows the response of respondents to statement 5 with 79% of the respondents strongly agreeing with the statement at pre-test, which states that “social studies as a unique subject area should be made compulsory at all levels of Nigeria’s educational system”. Ninety nine percent respondents at post-test maintained a positive opinion to the statement. From this result, it can be deduced that 77 percent respondents disagreed with the statement 6, which states that “social studies does not inculcate concepts of trust, understanding, tolerance and co-operation among students at pre-test”. In the same vein at post test 98% respondents maintained their opinion in disagreeing with the statement. This can be explained by the fact that to

non-social studies scholars, social studies does not have much to offer any individual. However, to social studies students, the subject is all encompassing, building individual trust, cooperation, tolerance and acceptance of one another.

Eighty nine percent of respondents at pre-test approved of the statement 7 which indicates that “social studies enable people to think critically and behave rationally”. At post test 99% respondents also held the same opinion. The result of this statement represents the opinion of respondents to statement 8. Eighty six percent of the respondents at pre-test agreed with the statement that “social studies prepare the individual through acquisition of knowledge, attitudes, values and skills necessary for social and civic responsibilities”. At post test there was a marked difference in responses as to the statement above as 100% agreement response was recorded which could be traceable to the teaching undergone by the respondents on the relevance and uniqueness of social studies. 95 percent respondents at pre-test and 100 percent at post-test were responses made by respondents to affirm their acceptance of statement 9 which indicates that “love, tolerance, cooperation and acceptance of one another regardless of religious differences will go a long way to solve religious problems”. Ninety eight percent and 99% respondents respectively, at pre-test and post test approved statement 10 which states that “religion should be a tool that unite and not a tool used for conflicts and mass destruction of lives and properties”. This shows that the causes of religious conflicts are to a large extent due to misuse of religion as a positive tool for nation building.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS:

One of the most important aspects of social studies education is preparing youths to become useful citizens, making positive contributions to national development. According to Dunn (2002), an important goal of social studies education is to equip students with the tools necessary to make sense of international developments, and to pose questions that help students understand the world and how it came to be. However, social studies has been neglected over the years in the Nigerian school curriculum, the teaching of the subject has been infiltrated with teachers who have no training or qualification to teach social studies. Lack of qualified and trained teachers to teach social studies in the schools has led to its objectives not been adequately achieved within the school classroom. One of the biggest challenges for teachers is inadequate teacher knowledge of the subject matter (Smith, 2002). The result of this study has shown that social studies taught by qualified and trained teacher(s) in the field can make significant impact on the achievement of its laudable objectives and on the way it is perceived by students which could lead to a change in their behavior. This change in perception and attitude is necessary in achieving religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence among students. To support this finding, Adeyinka (1990) gives an instance of when social studies was to be introduced and there was no adequate preparation of teachers to effectively handle and teach the subject in schools. As a consequence, social studies which in United State America is considered an important subject as noted by Adeyinka (1990: pp 112-116), is relegated to the background. Adeyoyin (1990) also notes that the result of this inadequate preparation of teachers to cope with the teaching of social studies is that the subject not only made a slow start but also faces some biases among the educational administrators as well as lecturers in the tertiary institutions.

The result of the study further shows the need for changing teaching strategies in social studies classrooms. The use of interactive teaching methods, as against the lecturing method used in most Nigerian social studies classrooms. This research finding confirms the opinion held by (Thornton, 1991: pp184-194 and Whelan, 2007) that the social studies curriculum is still largely textbook-driven, and the classroom is primarily teacher-dominated. Yet, contemporary notions of effective social studies instruction call for classrooms that are students centered, interactive, and infuse global perspectives (Au & Apple, 2004: pp 784-793; Kirkwood, 2001: pp10-15; Merry field, 2005). Lamy (2007: pp 112-116) provides another perspective on what colleges can do to prepare future social studies teachers. He advocates that another way of addressing the important need of preparing students for their future role as citizens in a global society is to promote active learning strategies in college courses that traditionally were taught by lectures. These strategies include case studies; problem based learning scenarios that focus on international issues, events, and global conditions.

It further shows that the education of students after pre-test had significant impact on their response at post test. The results confirm the views of Lewicki & Edward (2003). Hauss (2003) and Burgess (2003) that education is instrumental in breaking down stereotype, prejudice and increase mutual understanding; helping students develop new and broader images of the world and to embrace diversities. They further opined that education provides the

best opportunities to both prevent and de-escalate intractable conflicts. Educators can prevent conflicts by teaching tolerance and critical thinking. The result further lends support to the views of Iyamu (1998) that social studies is that aspect of education meant to help people learn how to get along with others. Godwin, et al (2001: pp 542-546) also confirms that “education is the best antidote for intolerance”.

From the results above, it can be clearly seen that education, creation of awareness and enlightenment of learners is capable of creating a tolerant and peaceful atmosphere among students. Through the effective teaching of social studies in the classrooms, religious differences can be resolved and understanding established. The improvement of respondents involved in this study could to an extent be attributed to the effect of the instructional sessions to which they were exposed to after the pre-test.

Previously, the need for teaching religious tolerance in schools was not given much attention because from the traditional society people had learnt to love and respect each other. Due to globalization and spread of civilizations, the family, which is the basic unit of the society, has grown apart and adequate child socialization has been neglected in pursuit of wealth and better quality of living. There is more pressure on the school to socialize the child, since all other agents of socialization continue to fail day by day. Educators today cannot afford to distance themselves from teaching the child basic problems in the society and ways to resolve them. Among other current problems facing Nigeria today is the problem of religious conflicts, which is tearing the nation apart, and making peaceful coexistence alien in the society.

Social studies can be used as an important conflict resolution tool because of its nature and problem solving capacity. Every school curriculum is designed to solve specific social problems at particular times; hence the needs for curriculum reviews are necessary after some years of implementation. Social studies as an existing subject in the school curriculum has the potential to build bridges to foster religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence, thus, healing the wounds caused by religious conflicts. Given the results of the study, it can be deduced that despite divergent religious beliefs of students found in the study, there was high acceptance of the use of social studies to solve religious conflicts. Social studies is an elaborate study of man’s life and his activities as it relates to his environment, and how this activity affects others. It can also be seen as a neutral school subject, that can be applied to any situation man is found, and can be used to solve any societal problem. This is because social studies draw its concepts and knowledge from various disciplines and integrates this knowledge and concepts to solve societal problems and inculcate national consciousness and national unity in diversity. To better understand the potentials of social studies, Mansaray (1991) grouped the objectives of social studies into three broad categories:

1. Knowledge: This means understanding the evolving social physical environment, acquiring basic facts and information about our environment.
2. Skills: Acquiring such basic skills as listening, speaking, reading and writing, observation, data-collection, analysis and inference, which are essential to the forming of sound judgment.
3. Attitudes and values: Development of positive attitudes of togetherness, comradeship and cooperation, the inculcation of values of honesty, hard work, fairness and justice. Chukwu (2010) opined that a critical analytical consideration of these three groupings go to justify the strength possessed by the subject in human development and attainment of national goals on education as probably no other single subject in the school curriculum has the potential of bringing about a high quality (character) education, understanding, tolerance, appreciation of various cultures and subcultures of component groups in Nigeria as social studies. According to Ross & Genevois (2006) a high quality education will always reflect the dynamic nature of culture and languages, the value of the individual in relation to the larger context and the importance of living in a way that promotes equality in the present and foster a sustainable future.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. There is a need for social studies to be introduced in senior secondary schools in order to ensure a smooth transition from secondary schools to colleges of education.
2. Teachers of social studies at all levels should move beyond the use of textbooks and conventional teaching strategies, to actively engage students in real life situations. Concepts from abstracts such as religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence can be more concrete when students are involved in searching for solutions bothering on conflicts.

3. Social studies should be taught at all levels of the Nigerian school system i.e. from primary school to all tertiary institutions. It should be adopted as a general studies subject in the tertiary institutions placed alongside general studies subjects. This is necessary to ensure that the citizenry has all needed information needed for peaceful coexistence.
4. Religious differences and conflicts can be solved through understanding, with concerted efforts through more education, enlightenment campaigns and open-dialogue; people will be more open to tolerate one another. Everyone should have access to education in Nigeria in order to have peace; the minimum level affordable should be made available to all. Education will increase tolerance and understanding. It will also make the citizenry more reliable for national development.

## CONCLUSION:

At the start of the study we anticipated that there will be no difference between pretest results and post test but comparison between pre-test and post-test results showed that there was significant difference at 95 percent confidence interval ( $P < 0.05$ ). Hence we fail to accept the null hypothesis that states there is no significant difference in the knowledge of social studies students their perception on religious tolerance at pre-test and post-test. The attitudes and perceptions of students on religious tolerance are capable of being influenced positively through effective teaching of social studies. This can be seen comparing responses to items in the pre test and post test. One can clearly see that students' responses were significantly different. Social studies can be used to create a more tolerant and united society, through its laudable aims and objectives.. Educators in Nigeria should adopt interactive methods of imparting knowledge, instead of the conventional lecture methods. The results in this study confirm that interactive methods of teaching, has far more significant influence in changing learners perceptions and attitudes to religion, than would the conventional lecture methods. The improvement in the knowledge and perception of the students involved in this study could to some extent, be attributed to the effect of the treatment or instructional sessions and the activities to which they were exposed. More Nigerian students are most likely to develop the needed skills for religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence, if they are exposed to different contemporary teaching strategies in the teaching of social studies education at all levels of the Nigerian school system.

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