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Research Article

Social Studies Education and National Security Awareness Among Nigerian Youths: Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract. National security is an essential condition for the political stability, social development and economic progress of Nigeria (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). However, contemporary security challenges, including terrorism, violent extremism, banditry, communal conflict, kidnapping, cybercrime, cultism, misinformation and youth-related violence, continue to affect communities and institutions across the country (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2019; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2023). Social Studies Education provides an important platform for developing responsible citizenship, national consciousness, social values, peaceful coexistence and awareness of civic responsibilities among young people (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2012; UNESCO, 2015). This paper examines the contribution of Social Studies Education to national security awareness among Nigerian youths, with particular attention to citizenship education, national integration, conflict prevention, peace education, responsible use of social media and community participation. The paper adopts a qualitative documentary research

design based on relevant scholarly literature, policy documents and institutional publications. It argues that Social Studies Education can contribute to national security by developing informed citizens who understand their responsibilities towards the state and society. However, inadequate instructional resources, overcrowded classrooms, insufficient teacher preparation, examination-oriented teaching, unemployment, political manipulation and the influence of harmful online content may limit its effectiveness (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013; World Bank, 2018). The paper recommends strengthening security-related civic content in Social Studies curricula, improving teacher training, promoting peace and digital literacy education, encouraging community-based learning and strengthening collaboration between schools, families, communities and relevant security institutions.

Keywords: Social Studies Education, National Security, Youths, Citizenship Education, National Integration, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

National security is a fundamental concern of every modern state because the survival and development of a country depend partly on its ability to protect its citizens, institutions, territory, values and national interests (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). In Nigeria, national security has traditionally been associated with the protection of territorial integrity and the prevention of external aggression. However, contemporary security challenges demonstrate that national security extends beyond military protection to include social, economic, political, technological and human dimensions (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2019; UNESCO, 2023).

Nigeria has experienced a variety of security challenges, including terrorism, violent extremism, kidnapping, banditry, communal conflicts, separatist violence, farmer-herder conflicts, cultism, cybercrime and other forms of criminality. These challenges have consequences for education, economic activities, social relationships and national development (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2019; World Bank, 2018).

Young people occupy an important position in Nigeria's demographic and social structure. They can contribute positively to national development through education, employment, innovation, entrepreneurship and civic participation (Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2019). At the same time, social exclusion, unemployment, exposure to extremist narratives, misinformation, peer pressure and other social conditions may increase vulnerability to certain forms of criminal or violent behaviour (Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2019; UNESCO, 2023).

Social Studies Education is particularly relevant because it is concerned with the study of society and the development of responsible citizenship. The subject seeks to help learners understand their social environment, develop appropriate values and participate constructively in society (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2012; Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council [NERDC], 2013). Consequently, Social Studies Education can provide young Nigerians with knowledge and skills necessary for understanding security issues and contributing to peaceful and stable communities.

The relationship between Social Studies Education and national security therefore deserves greater academic attention. Security awareness should not be regarded exclusively as the responsibility of security agencies. Schools and other educational institutions can contribute to preventive security by developing responsible citizens who understand peaceful conflict resolution, respect for law, tolerance, national unity and responsible participation in public affairs (UNESCO, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's contemporary security environment presents significant challenges to national development. The effects of insecurity include displacement, destruction of property, interruption of education, loss of livelihoods, fear and deterioration of social trust (Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2019; UNESCO, 2023).

Young people are particularly important to this discussion because education can influence their knowledge, values, attitudes and behaviour. While schools are expected to promote responsible citizenship, several factors may reduce the ability of the education system to achieve this objective (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013; World Bank, 2018).

In some educational settings, Social Studies may be taught mainly as an examination subject rather than as a means of developing practical citizenship competencies. Inadequate teaching materials, insufficient teacher preparation, overcrowded classrooms and limited experiential learning can weaken effective Social Studies instruction (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013; World Bank, 2018).

Furthermore, young Nigerians increasingly obtain information through social media and other digital platforms. Unverified information, hate speech, misinformation and extremist propaganda can influence perceptions and social relationships. This creates a need for Social Studies Education to incorporate appropriate civic, peace and digital literacy competencies (UNESCO, 2015, 2023).

The central problem addressed by this paper is therefore how Social Studies Education can be effectively utilized to improve national security awareness among Nigerian youths while developing responsible, peaceful and active citizens.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this paper is to examine the relationship between Social Studies Education and national security awareness among Nigerian youths.
The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the contribution of Social Studies Education to national security awareness among Nigerian youths;
2. Examine the role of Social Studies Education in promoting national integration and peaceful coexistence;
3. Identify challenges limiting the effectiveness of Social Studies Education in promoting security awareness;
4. Examine the role of teachers and educational institutions in developing responsible security-conscious citizens; and

5. Suggest strategies for strengthening Social Studies Education as an instrument of national security awareness.

Research Questions

The paper addresses the following questions:

1. How does Social Studies Education contribute to national security awareness among Nigerian youths?
2. How can Social Studies Education promote national integration and peaceful coexistence?
3. What challenges limit the effectiveness of Social Studies Education in promoting security awareness?
4. What roles can teachers and educational institutions play in developing responsible citizens?
5. What strategies can strengthen the contribution of Social Studies Education to national security?

Conceptual Clarification

1. Social Studies Education

Social Studies Education is an interdisciplinary field concerned with helping learners understand society, social relationships, institutions, values, citizenship and human interaction. It draws knowledge from disciplines such as history, geography, economics, political science, sociology and related fields (NERDC, 2013, 2014).

In the Nigerian context, Social Studies has an important citizenship function. It can help learners understand their rights and responsibilities, appreciate cultural diversity, develop democratic values and acquire skills for peaceful participation in society (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2012; UNESCO, 2015).

2. National Security

National security refers broadly to the protection and preservation of a state's sovereignty, territorial integrity, citizens, institutions, national interests and social stability (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999).

Contemporary approaches to national security recognises that security involves more than military threats. Economic insecurity, social instability, violent extremism, cyber threats, organised crime, environmental pressures and other forms of vulnerability can also affect national security (Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2019; UNESCO, 2023).

3. Security Awareness

Security awareness refers to knowledge and understanding of security risks, responsible behaviour and the capacity to recognise situations that may threaten individuals, communities or institutions.

For young people, security awareness can include understanding the consequences of violence, recognizing misinformation, rejecting extremist recruitment, reporting suspicious activities through appropriate channels, respecting laws and promoting peaceful relationships (UNESCO, 2015, 2023).

4. Nigerian Youths

Youth constitutes an important component of Nigeria's population and future workforce. Nigerian youths are not merely beneficiaries of national security but also important participants in community development, civic activities and peacebuilding (Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Social Studies Education and Citizenship

One of the major purposes of Social Studies Education is the development of responsible citizenship. Citizenship education provides learners with knowledge of institutions, laws, rights, responsibilities and values necessary for constructive participation in society (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999; UNESCO, 2015).

Effective citizenship education can encourage young people to respect the rights of others, obey legitimate laws and participate peacefully in democratic processes. These characteristics contribute to social stability (UNESCO, 2015).

2. Social Studies Education and National Integration

Nigeria is characterized by considerable ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural diversity. Diversity can contribute positively to national development, but social differences may also become sources of tension when accompanied by discrimination, intolerance or political manipulation (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999; Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2019).

Social Studies Education can promote national integration by exposing students to Nigeria's diverse cultures and encouraging mutual respect. Classroom discussions, cooperative learning and civic activities can provide opportunities for students from different backgrounds to interact and develop understanding (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2012; NERDC, 2013).

3. Social Studies Education and Peace Education

Peace education involves developing knowledge, attitudes and skills that enable individuals to prevent and resolve conflicts without violence (UNESCO, 2015). Social Studies provides opportunities to examine causes of conflict, consequences of violence, negotiation, tolerance, mediation and peaceful dispute resolution. These competencies are relevant to communities experiencing communal and interpersonal conflicts (UNESCO, 2015).

4. Social Studies Education and Countering Violent Extremism

Young people may encounter extremist narratives through social networks, informal social groups and other communication channels. Education can provide learners with critical thinking skills that enable them to question manipulative narratives and evaluate information (UNESCO, 2015, 2023). Social Studies teachers can discuss the social consequences of violent extremism without turning classrooms into platforms for partisan political messaging. Students can be taught to distinguish

legitimate civic participation from violence and criminal activity (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999; UNESCO, 2015).

5. Social Studies Education and Digital Citizenship

The increasing use of digital platforms has changed how young Nigerians communicate and obtain information. Digital citizenship education can help learners understand responsible online behaviour, privacy, misinformation, cyberbullying, hate speech and the consequences of sharing unverified information (UNESCO, 2023). This dimension is increasingly relevant to national security because misinformation can contribute to fear, social tension and conflict (UNESCO, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

1. Social Learning Theory

This study is anchored partly on Social Learning Theory, associated with Albert Bandura. The theory explains that individuals can learn behaviours through observation, imitation and interaction with their social environment (Bandura, 1977) Applied to Social Studies Education, the theory suggests that students can acquire peaceful and responsible behaviours when they observe teachers, parents, community leaders and peers demonstrating tolerance, cooperation and respect for law (Bandura, 1977).

Teachers therefore have an important role as social models. If students observe constructive conflict resolution and responsible civic behaviour within educational environments, such behaviour may influence their own social conduct (Bandura, 1977).

2. Systems Theory

The paper also draws on Systems Theory, which views society as a system consisting of interconnected institutions. Education, family, government, security agencies, communities and civil society interact within the wider national system. From this perspective, national security cannot be produced by security agencies alone. Educational institutions form part of the broader national security system because they contribute to human development, civic values and social stability (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013; World Bank, 2018).

METHODOLOGY

The paper adopts a qualitative documentary research design. It relies on secondary sources including scholarly books, journal articles, government documents, educational policy documents and publications of relevant national and international institutions (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013; UNESCO, 2015; World Bank, 2018). The materials were examined thematically around five major areas: citizenship education, national integration, peace education, youth security awareness and digital citizenship. The documentary approach is appropriate because the study seeks to examine existing knowledge concerning the relationship between Social Studies Education and national security rather than collect primary data from respondents.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

1. Social Studies Education as a Tool for Security Awareness

Social Studies can introduce students to the nature and consequences of insecurity. Through age-appropriate classroom discussions, learners can examine issues such as terrorism, kidnapping, communal violence, cultism, cybercrime and violent extremism (Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2019; UNESCO, 2023). The purpose should not be to turn students into security personnel but to develop responsible citizens capable of recognizing risks and making informed decisions (UNESCO, 2015).

2. Development of Responsible Citizenship

Responsible citizenship is central to national security. Citizens who understand their rights and responsibilities are more likely to participate constructively in society (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999; UNESCO, 2015). Social Studies can teach learners about constitutional principles, civic responsibilities, and respect for legitimate authority, community participation and peaceful political engagement (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999; NERDC, 2013).

3. Promotion of National Unity

National unity is important for social stability. Social Studies can promote understanding among learners from different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2012; NERDC, 2013). Teachers can use Nigeria's cultural diversity as an educational resource by encouraging students to examine similarities and differences among communities and to appreciate the contributions of different groups to national development (UNESCO, 2015).

4. Conflict Prevention and Peaceful Dispute Resolution

Many conflicts begin with disagreements that escalate because of intolerance, misinformation or ineffective communication. Social Studies Education can teach negotiation, dialogue, mediation and cooperation (UNESCO, 2015) Students can participate in simulations, debates and group activities designed to develop communication and conflict-resolution skills (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2012).

5. Youths and Digital Security Awareness

The digital environment creates opportunities and risks. Young people can use social media for education, entrepreneurship and civic participation, but they may also encounter false information, cybercrime, hate speech and extremist content (UNESCO, 2023). Social Studies Education can therefore incorporate digital citizenship, information verification and responsible online communication. Students should learn to evaluate sources before sharing information and understand the possible social consequences of irresponsible digital behaviour (UNESCO, 2015, 2023).

6. Role of Teachers

Teachers are important agents of socialization. Their approach to sensitive issues can influence students' attitudes towards diversity, conflict and citizenship (Bandura, 1977).

Social Studies teachers should therefore receive appropriate professional development on peace education, citizenship education, digital literacy and contemporary security issues (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013; World Bank, 2018).

7. Challenges

Several factors can limit the contribution of Social Studies Education to national security awareness.

These include:

- Inadequate instructional materials;
- Insufficient teacher training;
- overcrowded classrooms;
- Inadequate funding;
- Examination-oriented teaching;
- limited practical and community-based learning;
- Misinformation and harmful online content;
- Youth unemployment and social exclusion;
- Political and communal tensions; and
- Weak collaboration between educational institutions and relevant community institutions.

These challenges indicate that curriculum reform alone is insufficient. Effective implementation requires trained teachers, appropriate resources and supportive educational environments (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013; World Bank, 2018).

Prospects

Despite the challenges, Social Studies Education has considerable potential to contribute to national security.

- First, the curriculum can be strengthened to include age-appropriate themes on peacebuilding, conflict prevention, responsible citizenship and digital literacy (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2012; UNESCO, 2015).
- Second, experiential learning can be encouraged. Students can participate in community service, peace clubs, debates, civic projects and environmental activities (UNESCO, 2015)
- Third, teacher education institutions can provide specialised training in contemporary citizenship and security-related issues (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013; World Bank, 2018).
- Fourth, schools can develop partnerships with parents, traditional institutions, civil society organisations and relevant government institutions while maintaining appropriate educational boundaries. Finally, digital technology can be used

positively to provide students with reliable educational materials and opportunities for civic learning (UNESCO, 2023).

CONCLUSION

Social Studies Education has an important role in developing national security awareness among Nigerian youths. Its contribution extends beyond the transmission of academic knowledge to the development of responsible citizenship, national consciousness, tolerance, peaceful conflict resolution and social responsibility (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2012; UNESCO, 2015).

Nigeria's security challenges demonstrate that national security requires contributions from multiple sectors of society. While security agencies remain essential to the protection of lives and property, educational institutions can contribute through preventive and developmental approaches (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999; Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2019).

A well-implemented Social Studies programme can equip young Nigerians with knowledge, values and skills necessary to participate positively in their communities. However, this potential can only be achieved through adequate teacher preparation, appropriate learning resources, practical teaching methods and stronger integration of citizenship, peace and digital literacy education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013; World Bank, 2018).

Recommendations

Based on the discussion, the paper recommends that:

1. Social Studies curricula should be strengthened with appropriate content on citizenship, peacebuilding, conflict prevention and national security awareness.
2. Teachers should receive continuous professional development on contemporary security issues, peace education, digital citizenship and conflict-resolution education.
3. Schools should promote experiential learning through debates, peace clubs, community service, civic activities and problem-solving projects.
4. Digital literacy should be integrated into Social Studies Education to help students identify misinformation, hate speech and harmful online content.
5. National integration should receive greater emphasis through teaching approaches that promote tolerance, respect for cultural diversity and peaceful coexistence.
6. Government should improve educational resources and infrastructure so that Social Studies can be taught effectively.
7. Parents, communities and educational institutions should cooperate in developing responsible and security-conscious young citizens.
8. Security education should remain rights-respecting and development-oriented, focusing on prevention, civic responsibility and peaceful participation rather than creating fear among students.
9. Research should be encouraged on the relationship between Social Studies Education, youth behaviour, digital media and contemporary security challenges in different Nigerian states.

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