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ENSURING THE POLITICAL RIGHTS OF THE CHILD THROUGH SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the capability of social studies at developing in learners the awareness of their socio-political rights and their freedom to exercise these rights in the society. Information gathered from questionnaire administered to 500 pupils was analysed with percentages. It was discovered that social studies adequately exposes learners to their civic rights and obligations and that the pupils were allowed to exercise these rights at home and in the classroom but such freedom was restricted outside the classroom and in the larger society. The findings were discussed and necessary recommendations were suggested.

INTRODUCTION

Among the contemporary issues and newly emerging initiatives in the Nigerian social studies programme are citizenship and human rights education. While citizenship education is designed to build in young learners, knowledge, understanding and skills crucial for full and effective participation in the society as well as making good judgment and wise decisions, human rights education inculcates the awareness of those rights which belong to every man, woman and children (Omosehin, 2002). Through the inculcation of necessary social values and attitudes therefore, social studies is expected to make children aware of their various rights and obligations through the citizenship and human rights education embedded in its curriculum.

However, recent happenings on the rights of the child point to the significant position the child occupies in the society. The child is the resource pool from which the future generation is predicated. The future human resources and leadership of any

society is inextricably linked to the ways in which its children are nurtured and developed. Gye-Wado (1990) maintained that the development of human rights has been underscored by two approaches namely the traditional approach and the socialist approach.

The traditional approach is derivable from natural law conceptions. This approach suggests a general system of rights that is common to mankind irrespective of his nationality, creed or sex. These rights are deemed inalienable with divine contents. In essence therefore, the regime of human right within the traditional approach was concerned with the citizen and what could be done to establish his humanity. Such rights include the right to life, freedom of speech, freedom of association and so on. Here civil and political rights become the focus. The socialist approach views human right as legal potentiality, which requires governmental activity to become a social reality or a social fact.

Vasak (1977) opines that the first generations of human rights are essentially informed by the notion of liberty and political participation. These are basically civil and political. The bulk of these rights are contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 and the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, 1986. *Article 20(2) p 140*

The paper therefore, examines the level of awareness of the child's political rights in Nigeria and the roles social studies plays in inculcating this awareness into the Nigerian child. However, mention is also made of the development of human rights in Africa from the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial era.

Human right in Pre-colonial Africa

Pre-colonial Africa had its own notion of human rights. However, pre-colonial Africa was neither culturally nor politically homogenous. But yet there were certain indices of socio-political life that could be said to have been prevalent among the various nationalities of pre-colonial Africa. Human rights at this era were collective. The whole community was the focus of rights and privileges as well as duties. However children at that time were to-be-seen and not heard because it was a taboo for a child to comment, question or contribute to discussions in the society.

Colonial Era

This era brightened the life of the child since it recognized that the child as a member of society has every right to be catered for, to be protected, to have access to good education and freedom of association.

Post-Colonial Era

The Organization of African Unity as well as the United Nations Organization stipulated the rights and protection of the child in their charters. The African Charter represents both the African perspective as well as the minimum programme for human rights. The development of rule of human rights either at the international or regional levels have taken into consideration the peculiarities of the child. This being the situation, this paper tries to examine the level of awareness of the child's socio-political rights in Nigeria, the extent at which he exercises these rights and the roles of social studies in this regard.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered in the study:

- Do parents create enabling environment for the child to exercise his socio-political rights?
- Is the child allowed to contribute to decision making in school?
- Does the (Nigerian) child enjoy his rights and freedom in the class?
- Does the Nigerian child make any contribution in decision making in the society?
- Does social studies promote the awareness of the child's rights and duties among the learners?

Methodology

Population: Primary 4 to 6 pupils whose ages range between 9 and 12 years formed the population for the study.

Sample: A total of 500 pupils were sampled for the study. One hundred (100) pupils from two schools in each of the five political divisions of Lagos State were sampled. The divisions are Epe, Badagry, Ikeja, Lagos Island and Ikorodu.

Instrumentation: The instrument used for collection of data was the questionnaire containing sections A, B, C, D, and E.

Validity and reliability of Instrument: The questionnaire was given to some experts in Early Childhood Education to validate after the initial draft and necessary corrections were made. Their contributions were considered in the final draft. The reliability of the instrument was established at 0.68 using the test-re-test reliability.

Administration of Instrument: Copies of the questionnaire were distributed to primaries 4-6 pupils in each of the schools randomly selected in the five divisions of the state. This was done with the assistance of the class teachers who actually

supervised the administration of the instrument.

The help of the teachers were sought because it was believed that the pupils would feel more relaxed receiving instructions from their teachers than from a stranger. After completion, the teachers collected them and handed them over to the investigator.

Data Analysis

Research Question One: Do parents create enabling environment for the child to exercise his rights? The analysis is presented in table I below.

Table I: Rights of the Child at Home (in percentages)

S/N	Items	Responses	
		YES	NO
1.	Are you allowed to express your feelings at home?	[390] 78%	[110] 22%
2.	Do you choose your class yourself?	[330] 66%	[170] 34%
3.	Can you put on the television without permission from your parents?	[330] 66%	[170] 34%
4.	Your parents do not complain when you choose any program or station you like.	[135] 27%	[365] 73%
5.	Are you always allowed to visit your friends?	[210] 42%	[290] 58%
6.	Are you allowed to make comments during meetings at home?	[270] 54%	[230] 46%
	Total	[1665] 55.5%	[1335] 44.5%

The above table shows the data obtained after calculation. 55.5 percent of the respondents gave affirmative response to all the items while 44.5% gave negative response. This implies that children are allowed to exercise their various rights at home.

Research Question Two: Is the child allowed to contribute to decision making in the school? The analysis is presented in table II below.

Table II: Rights of the child in the school (in percentages)

S/N	Items	Responses	
		YES	NO
1.	Do you elect your schools prefects yourself?	[220] 44%	[280] 56%
2.	Are you allowed to attend meetings with the teachers?	[60] 12%	[440] 88%
3.	Have you been taught leadership qualities and roles in the school?	[290] 58%	[210] 42%
4.	Does the school organize visits (for you) to government offices and educational institutions?	[200] 40%	[300] 60%
5.	Do you have free access to your head teacher?	[300] 60%	[200] 40%
	Total	[1070] 42.8%	[1430] 57.2%

From table II above, the percentage of respondents that responded "yes" to all the items was 42.8% while those that responded "no" was 57.2%. It shows that the child's rights are limited in the school.

Research Question Three: Does the Nigerian child enjoy his rights and freedom in the classroom? The analysis is presented in table III below.

Table III: Rights of the child in the classroom (In percentages)

S/N	Items	Responses	
		YES	NO
	Are you allowed to choose your class captain yourselves?	[400] 80%	[100] 20%
	Is your teacher very friendly with you?	[410] 82%	[90] 18%
	Are you allowed to ask questions in the class?	[440] 88%	[60] 12%
	Does your teacher always use cane during lessons?	[50] 10%	[350] 70%
	Are female teachers friendlier than the male teachers?	[40] 8%	[210] 42%
	Total	[1690] 67.6%	[810] 32.4%

Table III shows that the percentage of respondents who responded positively to all the items was 67.6% while those that responded negatively was 32.4%. This implies that the children exercise their rights in the class.

Table IV: Rights of the child in the society (in percentages).

S/N	Items	Responses	
		YES	NO
1.	Have you ever been to the Lagos State House of Assembly?	[50] 10%	[150] 9%
2.	Have you ever met the Chairman of your Local Government Area?	[110] 22%	[390] 78%
3.	Do you attend community meetings in your area?	[70] 14%	[430] 86%
4.	Are you allowed to hold children's (only) rallies or meetings?	[110] 22%	[390] 78%
5.	Have you ever advised your father about community issues?	[210] 42%	[290] 58%
6.	If you have, did he take to your advice?	[102] 20.4%	[398] 79.6%
	Total	652 21.73%	[2348] 78.27%

Research Question Four: Does the Nigerian child make any contribution to decision making in the society? The analysis is presented in table IV below.

Table IV above shows that the percentage of respondents who responded to 'yes' was 21.73% while those who responded to 'no' was 78.27%. This implies that the child's rights were restricted if not totally eroded in the society.

Research Question Five: Does social studies inculcate human rights (i.e. right of the child) into the learners? The analysis is presented in table V below.

Table V: Awareness of the rights of the child through social studies (in percentages).

Topics Learned in Social Studies:

S/N	Items	Responses	
		YES	NO
1.	Your duties at home	[351] 70.2%	[149] 29.8%
2.	Father's duties at home	[322] 64.4%	[178] 35.6%
3.	Mother's duties at home	[320] 64%	[180] 36%
4.	Functions of government	[258] 51.6%	[242] 48.4%
5.	Your needs at home	[333] 66.6%	[167] 34.4%
6.	What you need before you start school	[273] 54.6%	[227] 45.4%
7.	Your needs at school	[320] 64%	[180] 36%
8.	What you need after school	[281] 56.2%	[219] 43.8%
9.	How to live with other people	[410] 82%	[90] 18%
10.	Conflicts (or quarrels) among people	[234] 46.8%	[266] 53.2%
11.	Law courts	[330] 66%	[170] 34%
12.	Free movement (freedom of movement)	[310] 62%	[190] 38%
13.	Jobs done by people in the community	[411] 82.2%	[89] 17.8%
14.	Money and how to save money	[136] 27.2%	[364] 72.8%
15.	Our rights and duties in the society	[284] 56.8%	[216] 43.2%
	TOTAL	[4573] 60.97%	[2927] 39.03%

Table V shows the responses of learners to the various topics on fundamental human rights of the child learned in social studies. From the table, 60.97% responded positively to all the items suggested while 39.03% responded negatively. This implies that the learners are being kept aware of their rights through social studies education.

Discussion

The study revealed that social studies promotes in the child, the awareness of his rights as early as the primary school level (Table V). Thus, it inculcates necessary knowledge into the young learner who becomes tomorrow's leader and decision maker. The inculcation of these rights will help to promote the actualization of one of the national goals of Nigerian, that is, the building of "a just and egalitarian society" [FRN, 2004].

A just and egalitarian society connotes a Nigerian society where every citizen [young and old] has equal opportunity to personal development, equal access to fair deal, justice as well as equal distribution and use of the available natural and national resources [Akinlaye, 2003]. This implies strong assurance of equal dispensation of justice to all citizens irrespective of social position, age, level, and socio-economic status.

Hence, one major objective of social studies for the primary school level among others is "to develop in children a positive attitude to citizenship and a desire in them to make a positive personal contribution to the creation of a united Nigeria" (Okobia 1984). Citizenship in this regard means the enjoyment of all rights—political, civil and legal—along with other features.

Therefore, through citizenship and human rights education contained in social studies curriculum (as distinct areas of study or as integrated topics), is expected to ensure that the child is conversant with his rights and be so prepared to exercise such rights now as a child and in the future as an adult. With this awareness however, is the child allowed to exercise and enjoy his fundamental human rights in the society?

The study further revealed that children are allowed to exercise their rights at home (table I) and in the classroom (table III) but with some restrictions on general schools and societal matters (tables II and IV). These revelations show that while in a miniature social environment, the children are free to exercise their rights but viewed as minors in the larger society (including the school) hence, the restriction

However, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1986 African Charter on Human and People's Rights and the 1953 European Convention on the Protection of Human Rights guarantee the rights of the children along side other categories of humans. Consequently, the rights were categorized into:

- (a) Civil and political rights e.g. rights to life, freedom of access to information, freedom of movement, religion, association, thought and rights to vote and be voted for.
- (b) Economic and social rights i.e. people's social, economic and cultural rights to education, to form and belong to trade unions, to own properties, to shelter, health etc.
- (c) Collective and group rights i.e. right to decent environment free from pollution, protection, from destruction, right to self-development, self determination, right of minorities and colonized people etc. (Omosehin, 2002).

Children are as well free to enjoy all the rights subject to some individual national constitutional modifications. The exposure of children to and their preparation for enjoying these rights rest on social studies education being the only core subject that teaches related concepts at the primary and junior secondary school levels.

The objective, nature and scope of social studies portray its capability for promoting effective citizenship and the understanding of their rights among the children. By understanding human relationship, social studies aims at producing children and youth who possess skills, competences, moral values and judgment required to effectively live, interact, interrelate and contribute positively to the economic, social, political and cultural development of the Nigerian society in particular and the world in general (Okobia, 1984; Omosehin, 2002). This is premised on the inclusion of concepts such as civic and moral rights; social obligations, citizenship, freedom, justice, conflict, co-operation etc. in the social studies' content.

The recommended methods for social studies instructional activities also encourage freedom of speech, association, movement, source of information, privacy etc. among the young learners. Therefore, through its nature, scope, content and methods, social studies ensures the awareness and understanding of the socio-political rights of the child by the young learners.

Conclusion

The findings of this study show that the child in the home and class can fully exercise his socio-political rights in matters affecting him. While in the school (outside the classroom) and in the larger society, those rights are limited. However, the social studies lessons adequately inculcate these rights (and obligations) into the learners.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following are thereby recommended:

- The child, as a member of the society and as a leader of tomorrow should be allowed to fully exercise his rights in the society.
- The school (as an agent of socialization) should give the child an atmosphere of freedom and peace. A hostile school environment prevents effective learning.
- The school should bridge the gaps between the pupils and all the social and political institutions existing within the locality. The home is the first point of call for the child hence, the need for the child to have a sense of belonging. Allowing the child to contribute to discussions germane to his life is a positive step in the right direction.
- The objectives for teaching social studies at various levels would need to be expanded to further include more concrete attempts at promoting citizenship and human rights education.
- Social studies teachers need to put more emphasis on issues or topics that promote peace, unity and freedom in their lessons.

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