

## Promoting Quality Education in Social Studies Through Constructivist Teaching Model

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### Abstract

There is wide spread dissatisfaction on the quality of education that is run in Nigeria. This is evident in the factors or indices that make education to be adjudged to be qualitative. Aggressive policy and efforts are gravely needed to reverse the incidence especially as the country is in the state of economic recession. This is so as quality education is a requisite cornerstone to development in all areas of life in society. Constructivist model of teaching is proven to be effectual and contemporary enough to guarantee quality education that can promote holistic development in society. Therefore, this paper deals with, constructivism in the curriculum and the place of a social studies teacher in a constructivist classroom, the role of constructivist teaching model in promoting quality education in social studies, the benefits of constructivist approach in a social studies classroom, weaknesses of constructivism in social studies classroom, and conclusion/recommendations.

**Keywords:** Quality education, social studies and constructivist teaching model.

### Introduction

Social studies is included in the school curriculum to bring up citizens with the desired quality behaviours, orientation, skills and pattern of relations that would eschew or help us to solve our societal problems. And how can these problems be solved? The problems can be solved through the process of engaging the learners in higher order thinking and reflective thinking exercise that generate ideas, knowledge and panaceas that can be applied in our real life experiences with a view to solving our societal problems. One of these problems as it concerns the thrust of this paper is lack of quality in Nigerian education. "It has been disclosed that Nigeria's education system has lost its glory by occupying the 145<sup>th</sup> position in primary education advancement in the world's records" (Adesulu, Uwandu, & Iruoma, 2016). According to this source, "not everyone who teaches in school possesses the methodology of imparting knowledge to students". This has occasioned the incidence where citizens lack the required competence necessary for effective functioning in society. Constructivist model is a ready example of these methodologies not commonly used by social studies teachers, but effectual in social studies class for promoting quality education. To achieve quality education, quality policy has to be put in place to support education policy which according to National Board of Education (2000), the basis of quality policy is the factors which are in the field of education considered most important for the positive development of the society. Thus:

- Equality in education;
- Lifelong learning;
- Support to innovations and creativity; and
- Securing competitiveness.

According to VVOB (2017), "A good quality education is one that provides all learners with capabilities they require to become economically productive, develop sustainable livelihoods, contribute to peaceful and democratic societies, and enhance individual well-being" Assuredly, one of the approaches through which quality education can be achieved is with the employment of constructivism. Constructivism holds that learners are not tabular rasa which is contrary to John Locke, the proponent of this theory. This holds that learners are not empty vessels, not a depository, and so can construct their own new knowledge based on their existing knowledge which serves as an important foundation for new learning (Citizens World Mar Vista, 2015). Constructivism is a learner centered model of teaching that has influenced a number of disciplines including social studies which is the thrust of this paper.

### Constructivism in the curriculum and the place of a social studies teacher in a constructivist classroom

Constructivism repudiates any teacher centered model of teaching, rather enthrones and glorifies learners centered models of teaching. The role that a social studies teacher plays in a constructivist's classroom is that, he assumes the role of a moderator, guide and facilitator. The social studies teacher only shapes and refines ideas or knowledge constructed by the students after presenting the learning tasks or experience.

It is inevitable that some students might misconstrue far away from the crux of what is to be learnt, straying away from the focus should be a common phenomenon. And so, the teacher has the role of guiding the

students through the specific experience or activities and provides the correct answer or fact (Teague, 2000; Rice and Wilson, 1999).

Social studies education is the education that inculcates the acceptable behaviour that is expected of citizens. Some method of inculcating this is through memorization of facts and concepts. Constructivism which emphasizes the construction of knowledge by learners stresses that, social studies methodology should be titled to the ones that have foundation in constructivism approach and such as social interaction and cooperative learning.

This entails that “social studies teachers must encourage their students to engage in collaborative learning, use high-order thinking skills, construct their own knowledge about social studies concepts, and relate classroom lesson to their lives and experience (Rice and Wilson, 1999). A constructivist based method in a social studies classroom makes learning interesting and facilitates mental growth of learners and not only on the improvement of academic achievement and learning skills (Nuthall, 2000).

Social studies according to NCSS (1992), is the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Within the school programme, social studies provides coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such discipline as archeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, anthropology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from humanities, mathematics and natural sciences. The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world.

From this definition, it should be clearly known that the tasks of the teachers to the learners are so enormous. This requires a social studies teacher to have a broad horizon of knowledge that equips him to make the learners become what they are expected to become through social studies. And how can teachers and learners have this broad knowledge? It is through interacting with multiplicity of learning experiences provided through these subjects that social studies draws its content, and through their own knowledge based on social studies concepts.

The constructivist’s method as one of the contemporary methods of teaching social studies categorically stresses a break away from facts memorization. Social studies should progress and advance from cognitive orientation to psycho-motor and more of the affective. And so, constructivism in social studies is a means of breaking away from the traditional model of teaching (Teague, 2000). Constructivism does not so much emphasis specific and standardized curriculum but the use of the students’ previous knowledge and hands-on on problem solving (McCray, 2007). The teacher’s role is to establish a connection between what a student holds and the new knowledge he has encountered. The analysis, interpretation, and prediction that a social studies teacher is to make should be based on the nature of students responses. Open ended questions and interaction in the classroom that is dialogue-based is held supreme in a constructivist classroom. Teachers as well are expected to “tailor their teaching strategies to students’ responses and encourage students to analyse, interpret, and predict information” (McCray, 2007).

McCray also discredited the use of grades and standardized testing, rather they should be part of the learning process so that the students would be the ones to function majorly in the evaluation of their own progress. This has to be done in such a way that the explanations and answers to the problems and questions emanate from the learners, the content and the product of their interaction while in the classroom. The role of the teacher here is to assist the learners construct knowledge as he/she moderates and directs their activities towards realizing the stated objective. By so doing the teacher bears in mind the allotted time to any learning experience.

### **The role of constructivist teaching model in promoting quality education in social studies**

In the light of what VVOB (2017) described about quality education, an attempt is made to establish the synonym of quality education and constructivist teaching in social studies. Constructivist model of teaching in social studies is informed by the quest to improve the quality of social studies education. By so doing, teaching in social studies also employs constructivist model of teaching that is child-centred and activity based. In a constructivist classroom, social studies is set to work on the young of the society in order that they might conform to the acceptable standard and pattern of functioning in society by having hands-on experience. As constructivism “allows for a majority of the activities and lessons to be student-centred (Teague, 2000), so also quality education that is child-friendly places the child in the center and leads it to attain his/her full potential by emphasizing active participation. In the same vein, UNICEF (2000) maintained that quality education includes among others “processes through which trained teachers use child-centered teaching approaches in well managed classrooms and schools and skillful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities”. This clearly explicates that quality education is synonymous with constructivist teaching in social studies.

For quality education to be guaranteed it should not be based on a fixed process and fixed expectation since the society is always in the state of flux or change. In this wise, constructivist classroom is made to be dynamic, as well, in order to accommodate for the changing needs of society. This makes social studies teachers in a constructivist classroom to reevaluate and reconstruct their approach to teaching.

As stated by VVOB, solutions and adaptation of quality education systems be based on the real needs of a country and community. Real needs are such that require practical and immediate solutions or answers. And so, social studies in its constructivist teaching should deal with reality in a man's social and physical environment; makes use of practical experiences of oneself in constructing knowledge that leads to the provision of lessons that can be applied in real life situation.

Quality education which is result oriented aims at equipping citizens with basic skills for effective functioning in society for them to become economically productive; possessing sustainable livelihoods, contributing to peaceful and democratic societies and enhancing individual wellbeing (VVOB, 2017). Social studies also, in its constructivist teaching model, teach survival skills which are fundamental to human existence. Thus survival skills are skills related to trade and occupation that enable man to be ingenious enough to identify and create opportunities for economic engagements that put food on the table.

As stated by VVOB, "quality education can only be achieved if equality, and particularly gender equity, is achieved within the education system". This is exactly what constructivist teaching model in social studies upholds. It promotes equity and social justice as it recognizes all voices in the classroom and the development of social equilibrium and well-integrated personality, relatively free from undue anxiety (Esu and Inyang-Abia, 2004).

More so, just as quality education brings about innovation and creativity, constructivist teaching model in social studies makes use of technologies in its facilitation. Technology has become very indispensable and powerful in a social studies classroom as it facilitates teaching/learning as well as its usage in solving societal problems. In like manner, technology is a product of constructivism which is part and parcel of social studies. Constructivist teaching model in social studies teaches operational skills. Operational skills related to constructivist teaching in social studies include among others pottery, blacksmithing, local craftwork, carpentry, art.

#### **Benefits of constructivist approach in a Social Studies Class**

- As a contemporary method of teaching, constructivist is very beneficial to a class of mix-ability and inclusion class.
- Constructivism promotes social consensus in the classroom such that learners construct knowledge based on what is generally accepted by them in the classroom. This helps to rule out errors or inconsistencies in their process of building knowledge. It offers the learners the opportunity to checking and balancing a constructed knowledge.
- One prominent feature of constructivist is that, it provides a forum and atmosphere for higher order thinking and reflective thinking.
- Worth mentioning is that this teaching and learning approach introduces communal setting where the spirit of cooperation is developed and promoted.
- A constructivist class is a source of motivation for all varieties of learners especially the slow, shy, withdrawn or introverted ones. These categories of learner would always learn from, and be motivated by the very active, vibrant and enthusiastic ones in order to avoid shame and humiliation from their non-participation. Similarly, it caters for the "unique resources that students from non-mainstream backgrounds bring to school" (Citizens World Max Vista, 2015). The use of prepackaged curriculum that disfavour the learners that deviate from the mainstream is not emphasized.
- A constructivist classroom in social studies sets the tone of conviviality, which makes learning to be interesting as learners socially interact with themselves which reduces the feeling that they are a captive audience (Iheanacho, 2002) since most of the learners (especially the weak one are forced into the classroom against their wish. Being a supportive classroom with its conviviality, students feel that they belong to the classroom and they feel they are important, worthwhile, and valued (Mark, 2013). This type of classroom is "home away from home" (Denis, 2002).
- Importantly, "constructivist is a great tool in Kindergarten for developmental learning" (Lucks, 1999). It is indeed a great tool at this very level given that social studies is designed to focus on the young of the society in order that they may grow in an acceptable manner prescribed by the society.
- In a way, constructivist stresses that there is no one way to learning and so, accommodation should be made for students who can not cope with the usual and commonly used style of learning to learn in their own way. This points to the fact that, teaching should be designed to be open ended to cater for all backgrounds of learner as well as their learning styles (Citizens World Mar Vista, 2015).

#### **Weaknesses of Constructivism in Social Studies class**

In pedagogy, it is a known reality that no teaching methodology, model, strategy or technique is all sufficient and total. All have their own limitations, with constructivism not an exception.

Ayers and Frazee (2000) in McCray, asserted that all forms of constructivism are ineffective because

constructivism does not have much focus on the content knowledge that should be the centerpiece for teaching and learning. That, it is mostly disadvantageous to elementary school-age children that have limited experiences and knowledge since only few could be mature enough to determine what they need to learn.

One of the weaknesses of this teaching method is that, it is visibly and inherently attributed to be time-consuming. With academic time table seeming to be over crowded with so many subjects for a day, this undoubtedly, affects the duration of a lesson in a classroom. Talk less a teaching method (constructivism) that consumes much time which makes it difficult for a day's lesson to be hardly exhausted. This is a teaching method that is bereft of time-economy probably due to the fact that it is learner-centered, and children are known for poor management of time.

It is also argued by Lucks (1999) in McCray that there is a lot of work for teachers who use constructivism in the classroom. Also that, the approach is not effective on its own as it requires children to fall back to the use of models and examples that would facilitate effective learning.

Constructivism based lesson have sharp contrast with objective-based types in their planning. Planning a constructivist lesson is considerably different from the objective based lesson and also demands that teachers must be versed in it planning in order to guarantee success (McCray, 2000). In the same vein as it concerns objectives of a lesson, Hoagland (2000) in McCray, stated that not every goal of a lesson can be achieved through constructivism. And so, when attempting to plan a lesson the objective of a lesson must be taken into cognizance whether the objective fits constructivist approach. For instance, simple and straight forward learning experiences are not so much recommended for constructivist approach.

Zenner (2009) stated that constructivist approach to teaching/learning makes it quite difficult and complex for a teacher to comprehend the process and then translates it into practicals. Zenner stated that this approach if employed by an incompetent teacher who lacks the skills in handling it makes the teaching to be disorganized and detrimental for students.

Constructivism being a contemporary teaching approach leaves teachers that are only versed in traditional methods of teaching ill-prepared for constructivist teaching, and it requires teacher to be versed in child development, in observing the children in the class, diagnose children individual needs and interests and keeping records of their students' learning progress in order to reduce its limitation of being fragmented and inconsistent (Zenner, 2009).

Constructivism according to Zenner has the potential for students to draw unclear or untrue conclusions in an occasion where the teacher who is their facilitators is incompetent and not willing to give direction or feedback thereby making the students to lack direction since the students are required to handle their problems (learning experiences) with little or no guidance from the teacher. Even at this, students still need to learn through direct instruction. To buttress this fact, Batshaw (2007) in Zenner reported that research has shown that direct instruction in teaching and improving socially significant behaviours is the key for certain populations (learners) that we teach.

### **Conclusion/Recommendations**

It is indisputable that constructivism as a teaching and learning method has beneficial impact in our today's social studies classroom. It improves social studies skills as students learn from hands-on experience in constructing their own knowledge. Also, it offers opportunity for the breaking away from the traditional way of teaching social studies that hinge on fact memorization. From all the explications in this writing it is so conspicuous enough that constructivism toes the approach of social studies and vice versa. No doubt that these put together help to promote quality education which is a cornerstone to holistic development in society.

On the weaknesses of this teaching method, which among others is ill-preparedness and incompetence of teachers in its utilization occasioned by its novelty in the classroom, one could advance these recommendations:

- There should be in place a descriptive and prescriptive curriculum material that would provide a concrete framework, guidance, and recommendations for a teacher to fall back to in their teaching process in order that its inherent weakness of time-consuming nature, and its tendency to deviate from content knowledge among others would be considerably reduced.
- Evaluation tools that are compatible with constructivist approach be developed and workshops and training on this model of teaching be held in order to popularise and commonize the effective use of the model in a social studies class.
- In view of the weaknesses of the constructivist method and also the fact that no method is hundred percent perfect in the delivery of a lesson. It is the views of the authors that other methods should be used side by side with constructivist method to compliment its weaknesses.

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