



Perception of Teachers of Social Studies on Citizenship Education in Senior High Schools in Ghana



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Abstract

The tension over the subject matter of social studies fuelled by different camps from history and the social sciences led to a group from Teachers College, Columbia University organizing a round table in Chicago on social studies (Evans, 2004). This meeting was organized by Earle Rugg in a letter that cited a lack of agreement in the subject matter (Evans, 2004, p.37). Formerly, known as the National Council of Teachers of the Social Studies, NCSS sought to bring consensus and meaning to the subject by coining up a definition that: social studies shall include history, government, economics, geography, and sociology (Drafts, 1921). It is estimated that by the late 1920's more than 1,600 members had joined NCSS and it was growing in both membership and influence (Evans, 2004). NCSS has grown both in membership and structure and continues to go strong up to the present day in the United States. This study, however was informed and influenced by the existing literatures on the teaching social studies and how teachers respond to the scope, teaching methods in line with the ever changing curriculum. A desktop study design was used in the data collection. The analysis was exclusively qualitative.

Keywords: citizens, citizenship education, Ghana, social studies, teachers



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1.0 Introduction

Literature reveals that there is an ongoing debate with regards to the purposes and goals of Social Studies and on how particular social goals can be achieved (Ross, 2006; Brophy, 1990; Sears and Hughes, 1996). This debate on goals and purposes do not in any way act as deterrents towards the articulation of such goals and purposes. The major goal of social studies has been articulated as citizenship education which involves preparing citizens for active participation in a democracy by providing them with the necessary knowledge, skills and values (Adler and Sim, 2008; Ross, 2006; Hahn, 2001; Engle and Ochoa, 1988). According to NCSS (2010), the basic goal of Social Studies education is to prepare young people to be humane, rational, participating citizens in a world that is becoming increasingly interdependent (Brophy, 1990; p. 361). The goals of social studies education as outlined by the National Commission on Social Studies in Schools' Report (1989) revolve around five strands and they are; (a) development of civic responsibility and citizen participation; (b) development of a global perspective through an understanding of students' life experiences as part of the total human experience, past and present; (c) development of critical understanding of the history, geography, and the pluralistic nature of the civil institutions of the United States; (d) development of a multicultural perspective on the world's peoples through an understanding of their differences and commonalities throughout time and place; (e) development of students' capabilities for critical thinking about the human condition. Mullins (1990) states that these five goals were accompanied by recommendations on the characteristics of what content should be taught in social studies and these included the following:

- a. History and geography should be the unifying core of the social studies curriculum and should be integrated with concepts from economics, political science, and other social sciences
- b. Social studies should be taught and learned consistently and cumulatively from kindergarten through grade 12
- c. The curriculum should impart skills and knowledge necessary for effective citizenship in a democracy
- d. The curriculum should balance study of the United States with studies of other cultures
- e. Superficial coverage of content should be replaced with depth study of selected content (Mullins, 1990, p.1)

These goals have served as the organizing principle on what social studies aims to achieve and what content knowledge should be covered. According to Sears and Hughes (1996), even though educating for citizenship is central to social studies, the consensus over citizenship education is meaningless as it is a highly contested area and context specific. They further argue that behind that totem to which nearly all social studies researchers pay homage lies a continuous and

rancorous debate about the purposes of social studies (Marker and Mehlinger, 1992, p. 124). The argument being that the debate on social studies continues in part because citizenship itself as used in the field is a contested concept (Sears and Hughes, 1996). Barr, Barth and Shermis (1977) provide a useful analysis of the social studies through proposing competing views of the purposes and goals of social studies (Brophy, 1990). They identified three main traditions that describe contrasting approaches to social studies and these were analyzed and categorized according to content, purpose and method and they include: social studies taught as Citizenship Transmission; Social studies taught as Social Science; and Social studies taught as Reflective Inquiry.

The citizenship transmission approach implies that citizenship is promoted through the inculcation of right values as frameworks for making decisions. This involves transmission of concepts and values through such techniques as textbook, recitation, lecture, question and answer sessions and structured problem solving exercises. Within this approach the content is selected by an authority and the teacher's role is to interpret such a curriculum and to role model such values, beliefs and attitudes.

The second approach where social studies is taught as a social science is based on the premise that Citizenship is best promoted by decision making based on the mastery of social science concepts, and problems (Barr, Barth and Shermis, 1977). The method of teaching advocated by this approach is that of discovery where students are expected to discover and apply the different methods used in the social sciences. Content is derived from structure, concepts and processes embedded in the each subject and the integrated social science discipline.

The third and last approach is that of social studies taught as Reflective inquiry. Citizenship is promoted through a process of inquiry based on what students need to know. The students identify problems, reflect on them and test some of their insights. It is this self-selection of problems that constitute the content for reflection (Barr, Barth and Shermis, 1977: p. 67). Different scholars have argued that the identification of these three traditions have assisted in explaining the conflict in the field as well as providing some kind of consensus in social studies and have proved to its antagonists that the field is evolving (Thornton, 2005; Evans, 2004, Brophy, 1990).

2.0 Theories of Citizenship

Theories of citizenship as espoused in the literature on citizenship education tend to reflect a certain level of ambiguity and differences. Van Gunsteren (1998) identifies four theories of citizenship that seem to differ in terms of orientation and practice. The first theory is that of liberal citizenship which is rights –based; civic republicanism which is responsibilities-based; the communitarian citizenship which is collectivist; and lastly the neo-republicanism which combines elements of civic republicanism and liberal views of citizenship (Evans, 2006; Van Gunsteren, 1998).

2.1 Liberal Theory of Citizenship

According to Van Gunsteren (1998) the Liberal-Individualist theories view a citizen as a calculating holder of preferences and rights. Within this theory, citizenship is conferred on an individual by a state or nation. There exist a relationship between an individual and the state which includes both rights and responsibilities (Van Gunsteren, 1998). In the case of a democracy, the rights of an individual include the right to be heard and participate in their governance, equal protection of the law, the right to basic freedoms such as religion, speech and press. The responsibilities of the citizen include respect for the law and participation in activities of governance such as voting and joining interest and political parties (Engle and Ochoa, 1988)

2.2 Communitarian Theory of Citizenship

Communitarian theories of citizenship view citizenship as more than a matter of rights and strongly emphasize that being a citizen involves belonging to a historically developed community (Van Gunsteren, 1998). Therefore, indicating that citizenship in the communitarian sense emphasize participation and identity (Preece and Mosweunyane, 2004). For communitarians a citizen acts responsibly if they stay within the limits of what is acceptable within the community. The community is seen as a representation of unity and the absence of community indicates conflict. The community is well respected as it denotes a cultural resource that fosters people's relationships. It is this type of citizenship that promotes voluntarism, self-reliance and a commitment to each other. It operates at micro level and simply implies community responsibility (Preece and Mosweunyane, 2004).

3.0 Teacher Perspectives on Citizenship Education

Adeyemi et al (2003) conducted an excellent study of how elementary and secondary teachers define citizenship education. As a result of this study four perspectives emerged as; Critical thinking perspective, Legalistic perspective, Cultural pluralism perspective, Assimilationist perspective. These perspectives are in tandem with Barr, Barth and Shermis' (1977) traditions in which they describe contrasting approaches to social studies as; teaching social studies as citizenship transmission, teaching social studies as social science, teaching social studies as reflective inquiry.

3.1 Critical-Thinking Perspective

According to the critical-thinking perspective, teachers who adopted the critical-thinking perspective believe that citizenship education should help students question the status quo, develop critical thinking and questioning skills and encourage open-mindedness and tolerance (Adeyemi, et al, 2003). This perspective is aligned to Barr, Barth and Shermis (1977) tradition of teaching social studies as reflective inquiry in that it emphasizes the analysis of values, development of skills and dispositions and decision making. Banks (2008) refers to this model as

the transformational model in that it views citizenship as a process of socialization and counter socialization.

3.2 Legalistic Perspective

According to teachers in the legalistic perspective category, citizenship should stress obedience to the law, teach the basic structure of our political systems and inform students about their rights and responsibilities (Adeyemi, et al, 2003). This perspective dovetails with the tradition of teaching social studies as a social science since it puts emphasis on teaching knowledge as it is structured within the disciplines and on discovery and inquiry activities (Brophy, 1990).

3.3 Cultural Pluralism

Teachers who fall in the cultural pluralism perspective define citizenship education as the celebration of diversity and pluralism. They believe that rather than teach about the basic structure of our political institutions, citizenship education should expose students to a range of ideologies (Adeyemi et al., 2003).

3.4 Assimilationist Perspective

This perspective holds similar views with those of the legalist in that they explicitly reject the current ideas of political correctness and want to transmit to students the dominant values of the society. This perspective resonates well with the tradition of teaching social studies as citizenship transmission with emphasis on the inculcation of traditional values (Brophy, 1990). This is similar to the transmission model as explained in Weistheimer (2007) where students are encouraged to learn about the structure and function of the government, rights and responsibilities of citizenship and participate in non-threatening civic activities. He argues that this model is shared by the assimilationist and legalists and is the most common model of citizenship education presented in elementary schools. In assessing the various conceptual frameworks of citizenship education as offered by various scholars (Van Gunsteren, 1998; Adeyemi et al., 2003), it becomes apparent that there is a lot of complexity and ambiguity surrounding citizenship education. The varied conceptions of citizenship education though conflicting at times offer understanding about what it means to educate for citizenship in a democracy.

5.0 Social Studies and Development of Citizenship Education

In this section, I examine how social studies have been used to develop citizenship among African nations since independence. I have identified two ways in which social studies has been used to develop citizenship among African nations: 1. Africanization of the social studies curriculum; 2. Promotion of Inquiry-based learning. According to Kissock (1981) social studies has been used as a tool for national development. Its purposes, content and rationales differ from one country to

another. Among African nations it has been used to improve the image of people in the society after a colonial heritage (Sierra Leone); to learn ways of improving the economy after military rule (Ghana); to transform the political culture (Ethiopia); and to inculcate concepts of nationalism, unity, and interdependence among a citizenry of new nations with diverse populations (Nigeria) (Kissock, 1981, p. 1). The major question here is how does it do all this? The answer lies in the ability of social studies to prepare a well-informed citizenry who have the requisite knowledge, skills and values (Adeyemi, 2000). One way has been what Merryfield and Tlou (1995) refer to as the Africanization of the curriculum.

5.5 Africanization of the Social Studies Curriculum

Social studies provide knowledge, skills, competencies, attitudes and values which enable the youth to be good citizens (Merryfield, 1995). The development of a good citizen in Africa has been done through the Africanization of the social studies curriculum (Merryfield and Tlou, 1995). Merryfield and Tlou further define Africanization in terms of an African-centered education that refers to instruction that is developed from and centered on African peoples' experiences, thought, and environments (p. 2). This view is based on the premise that the curriculum has to be changed to reflect the views of the Africans as opposed to those of the colonizers. This Africanization of the social studies was done in different aspects of the curriculum which necessitated that the objectives, content, methods and resources or teaching materials be redirected to reflect the content and knowledge, values and attitudes as well as the skills of the indigenous people it is supposed to serve. This called for reforms in the social studies curriculum more especially the syllabus to be Africanized.

It is further argued that part of the Africanization is to build national identity and unity. A nation can only grow if its people have positive values towards their government, natural resources, social services, their society and themselves as a people. Social studies also inculcates the spirit of identity and togetherness through rituals such as national anthems, flags, and other ceremonies that provides a sense of belonging either to the community or nation (Merryfield and Tlou, 1995). In Ghana students are expected to sing the National Anthem and to respect the National flag as symbols of national consciousness and these have been institutionalised in Ghanaian schools. Students are expected to observe all these tenets of the nation as a way of learning good citizenship (Chishimba and Simukoko, 2000).

5.6 Promotion of Inquiry Based Teaching Methods

Social studies as a field of study advocates for the use of inquiry and problem based learning as opposed to rote learning that previously characterized learning during the colonial era (EDC/CREDO, 1968). It is believed that the problem-solving method is necessary as it develops the

child in such a way that she/he sees it as a democratic adventure, as well as the intellectual, critical, and cooperative aspects of the learners (Waghid, 2004; Salia-Bao, 1991). Dewey believed that the most effective and natural education occurred when problem solving was applied in the classroom as it encouraged critical thinking (Salia-Bao, 1991). Following Dewey's principle of democratic education, it was believed that such a method encouraged participation among learners through engaging them in cooperative adventures that would turn the classroom into a microcosm of democracy and thereby allowing the child to acquire skills and values of democracy. However, some scholars in social studies argue that the use of problem-based learning has been an ideal in most social studies classrooms in Africa as teachers have not been trained towards the use of such methods (Adeyemi, 2000; Asimeng-Boahene, 2000; and Merryfield). Further research carried out in seven member countries of the African Social Studies Programme (ASSP) have shown that inquiry based learning is talked about in schools but does not translate into teaching as classroom activities are teacher driven and dominated by the chalk-and-talk styles of teaching (Harber, 1997).

6.0 Challenges in Implementing the Social Studies Curriculum

A number of challenges have been attributed to the implementation of social studies in Africa and among the many are a lack of instructional materials, definitional problems and lack of trained and experienced teachers (Mautle, 2000; Asimeng-Boahane, 2000). It is interesting to note that in her study of some selected African countries Merryfield (1986) found that there was a problem of the definition of social studies and lack of instructional materials in schools. After about two decades, the problems still exist. It has been observed that there is a serious lack of instructional materials for teaching social studies such as conventional materials like textbooks, audio, audio-visuals and other resources that are technology related in Africa in general (Asimeng-Boahene, 2000; Mautle; 2000). Such materials where available, are also very limited in scope as they are usually content-related and not activity or problem-solving based (Asimeng-Boahene, 2000).

The other problem related to social studies teaching and implementation is related to the definition of social studies. In her study in Malawi, Kenya and Nigeria Merryfield (1986) observed that people who are responsible for the implementation of social studies, teachers and teacher educators were not clear about the meaning of social studies and could not differentiate it from the subjects it replaced. Another problem that appears to be dominant in Africa relates to the training of teachers or teacher education. It appears that there is a great shortage of trained and experienced social studies teachers in most African schools and teacher training institutions (Mautle, 2000; Asimeng-Boahene, 2000). Problems in the provision of materials and resources continue to dominate in classrooms in Ghana (Adeyemi, Boikhutso and Moffat (2003). The current state of affairs with regards to social studies needs to be addressed if social studies is to achieve its goal of preparing citizens for the 21 century.

7.0 Conclusion

A number of studies have been carried out on citizenship education in the United States (Hahn, 2001; 2004; Torney-Purta, 2002; Kahne and Westheimer, 2004; Parker, 2001a; 2008), in England and Canada (Warwick, 2007; Mclaughlin, 2000; Evans, 2006) and other countries such as Denmark, Germany and Netherlands (Hahn, 2004). However, all these studies focus on citizenship education and pedagogy in the classrooms, which skills and values are promoted and if students are being prepared for democracy. Very little is said about social studies' impact on students' lives. It is critical that a cross-national longitudinal study on the evaluation of social studies be undertaken to find out if it has been able to achieve its goals. This is important for social studies educators as they need to map out the road for social studies in the twenty-first century as it appears that there are a lot of expectations put on social studies and societal problems keep on increasing as nations grow. The advent of global education and multicultural education has also put social studies under a lot of pressure and scrutiny. The education of social studies teachers is also a target for research in that given what social studies is supposed to do, puts such teachers in a state of incompetence and dilemma. What should Teacher Education teach these teachers? For how long should they be prepared to be teachers? Maybe reforms need to begin with teacher education programs to restructure since it appears that what pre-service teachers learn from their teacher preparation is incongruent with what they are supposed to do in schools(Mathews and Dilworth, 2008). The stakes are high for social studies teachers and it is time that an evaluation of the field is undertaken not in piecemeal but wholesome. There is need to evaluate the social studies program at cross national levels to see the extent to which it does what it purports to be doing. Secondly, there is need for citizenship education as taught in various countries to move beyond the nation state and address global issues. There is need for students to understand that the world is interconnected, and create awareness of what is happening in other countries in order to be part of the global community. In going through the literature on social studies as recent as 2000, there was no mention of global perspectives.

8.0 Recommendation

This the study recommended that social studies should adopt a paradigm shift from an emphasis on nation building to incorporate world-mindedness in view of the current forces of globalization, immigration and the emergence of a new order in citizenship globally in order to cope with the emerging and changing trends in the field. There is need to be specific on what social studies ought to do and avoid language jargons such as national development, nationalism, nation building and refocus since the era of reconstruction has been overtaken by events.

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