

# Promoting Professionalism among Nigerian Social Studies Educators in a Global Information-Highway

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**Abstract:** Although professionalism is at the heart of every profession, it is doubtful if it has reached its apex among Social Studies Educators in Nigerian Primary and Secondary Schools. To achieve this, the study undertook the conceptual method of ascertaining the views of scholars in the subject area in a hi-tech society. On analysing their views, it was discovered that there is complacency in promoting professionalism among educators of Social Studies in the country. It was also gathered that there has not been significant efforts by Teacher Associations or the government in promoting interest in the teaching of Social Studies in Primary and Secondary Schools in the country. The need to promote greater professionalism among educators in that field especially in the area of information technology, giving incentives to educators in the area and promoting teacher-awards were recommended for optimum performance.

**Keywords:** Social, studies, information-highway, Nigeria, professionalism.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Social studies comprises of several disciplines such as history, geography, political science, and economics. It examines recurring social issues including controversies, specifically current and persistent local, national, and global issues.

It uses a range of skills drawn from the social studies disciplines, including information gathering and processing, map reading, critical thinking, and interpersonal communication as well as presentation skills (Higher Education Commission Manual, 2012, p.10). What elicited this study is the importance of teaching Social Studies in the light of professionalism in Nigerian Primary and Secondary Schools to catch up with the global competition of the information super highway.

## 2. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION OF VARIABLES

**Professionalism:** In this work, we would understand professionalism as the proficiency and efficiency involved in the formulation and implementation of policies towards the teaching of Social Studies in Nigerian Primary and Secondary Schools.

It is essential to note that the essential traits of teacher-professionalism include: Performing essential social services, possessing a body of specialized knowledge, having a high degree of autonomy, a code of ethics and organization into professional groups; others include, exalting service above personal gains, recognition by the public and setting its own standards (Fareo, 2015, p.192 ).

**Social Studies Educators:** For the purpose of this study, the phrase, Social Studies Educators, will be used to refer to those who either teach or formulate policies around Social Studies in Nigerian Educational System.

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**Information-Highway:** This deals with being Information and Communications' Technology (ICT) savvy. It means being professionally developed in ICT skills, competencies and capabilities which are needed for the effective implementation of ICT education in Nigeria.

### **Aim and Significance of the Study**

The aim of the study is to promote professionalism for Social Studies educators in Nigeria.

The study is significant because social studies forms the fulcrum of citizen education and the fulfillment of developmental goals as far as any nation is concerned.

The study is also important because it is an avenue for creating a sense of professionalism among Social Studies teachers in Nigeria.

In a country plagued by illiteracy, mediocrity and lack of pursuing teacher-based professionalism due to the craze for other white-collar jobs such as those in the oil industry, this study comes in as a catalyst for enhancing teacher-professionalism in the country in the area of teaching social studies. With this in place, educators as well as students of social studies will grow to love the subject and use the knowledge towards the development of the nation.

### **Statement of the Problem:**

Educators in Nigeria, especially those saddled with the responsibility of teaching Social Studies in both Primary and Secondary Schools, have not been positioned for corporate service delivery. The challenge of those who teach that subject is that there is lack of professionalism in terms of pushing the frontiers of making the job attractive by way of giving incentives to teachers to attract more teachers in that subject area.

Also, "teaching as a profession in Nigeria is still faced with a lot of problems. This is from the angle of the practitioners themselves and from government and the social environment" (Ozano, 2013, p.55). Since the problem is that of lack of professionalism among teachers of Social Studies in both Primary and Secondary Schools in Nigeria, the researcher attempts a study on how to engage the principles of professionalism among educators in that subject area.

Another problem is the inability of most Nigerian teachers to be professionally developed to teach with Information and Communications Technology (ICT) skills, competencies and capabilities that are required for the effective implementation of ICT education - A problem that makes Nigeria unable to join the global competition of information super highway.

## **3. METHOD OF THE STUDY**

The study uses conceptual analysis. The researcher shall explore the views of various authors concerning the subject matter and posit ways of enhancing teacher-professionalism in Nigerian Primary and Secondary Schools in the area of teaching Social Studies.

### **Context and Theoretical Framework:**

The context of this study is Primary and Secondary Schools in Nigeria. This paper adopts the social responsibility theory as theoretical framework. In social sciences, the social responsibility though related to the press, emerged to uplift certain social standards and responsibilities which are aimed at promoting professionalism among experts (Adaja, 2012).

The theory which is associated with the Western world, particularly Britain and Sweden, places emphasis on the moral and social responsibilities of persons and institutions that work for the development of society. These responsibilities include: obligation to provide the public with information on important social issues and avoidance of activities that are harmful to public welfare and state security.

The choice of this theory is informed by the role of teachers as privileged citizens saddled with the responsibility of raising leaders of tomorrow. This indeed requires a great deal of responsibility. As part of fulfilling their social responsibilities, every teacher is expected to promote universal principles of education such as, human rights, justice, equity and citizenship and patriotism.

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For Siebert et al (cited in, Adaja, 2012), the social responsibility theory is premised on some functions namely: Serving the country making sure education gets to the nooks and crannies of the country; informing the public about issues of national interest and protecting the rights of the students by acting as guardians.

### Factors Militating Against Qualitative Social Studies Teacher Education in Nigeria:

According to Omiyefa (2012, pp. 131-132), certain factors are responsible for low quality social studies teacher education in Nigeria. He gives the factors as; Quality of entrants, training environment, quality of trainers, curriculum politics and government policies. We shall highlight these factors in light of the study thus:

- 1. Quality of Entrants:** The scholar argues that most students consider social studies as a last resort. Even those who have acquired the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) programme in Social Studies usually consider other juicy courses later in life. This affects Social Studies teacher education in the country.
- 2. Training Environment:** Most Colleges and Universities in the country lack basic facilities for teaching and effective learning. Besides, some do not promote research as their libraries are barren of research-materials due to outdated journals. Some Primary and Secondary Schools do not have good structures that motivate learning or teaching. These things do not provide the required environment which supports qualitative teacher-education in social studies.
- 3. Quality of Trainers:** There is also the challenge of lack of proficient and efficient tutors or trainers who would further raise teachers in the subject matter. Regrettably, Social Studies is often handled by tutors who have little or no idea of what the subject is all about.
- 4. Curriculum Politics:** Some time because of vested interests or selfishness, certain individuals push for moribund or outdated curricula which are not good to either the students or the system. The recent plans by the Federal Ministry of Education to merge Christian Religious Knowledge with Islamic Religious Studies in both primary and junior secondary schools across the country under a compulsory subject known as Religion and National Values (RNV) which came under attack by Nigerians is a case in point.
- 5. Government Policies:** The inconsistency of government policies on education as well as lack of licensing certified Federal or State Collages of Education for the award of degrees in Education are challenges militating against professionalism.

Conversely, as given by Fareo, the challenges of professional development for teachers in Nigeria include:

1. Teachers' inability to teach with Information and Communications Technology (ICT): Nigerian teachers are yet to be developed professionally in ICT skills, competencies and capabilities which are required for the effective implementation of ICT education. With this problem, Nigeria as a country cannot join the global competition of the information super highway.
2. Attitudinal problems: Despite the activities embarked upon by the Local, State and Federal Government of Nigeria to expose teachers to frequent training and re-training, there are sizeable number of teachers who are resistant to change due to their negative attitudes to introduce new innovations and techniques to teach their students, which could lead to students failure.
3. The weak correlation between school enrolments and the number of teachers employed in each school: The fragile correlation between school enrolments and the number of teachers employed in each school is the most obvious indicator of poor deployment. Variations in pupil – teacher ratio between schools are typically very large in Nigeria, they range from 50 to 70 pupils to one teacher.
4. Teachers rarely enjoy the same work environment as other professions: Most government schools have little or no furniture for students and teachers; where there are, the staff rooms and classrooms are dilapidated and these inhibit teaching-learning process.
5. Nigerian teachers do not receive good salaries as other professionals do. As a result, commitment to the growth of the profession is affected (Fareo, 2013, pp.67).

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### Towards promoting professionalism for Social Studies Educators in Nigeria: Discussions:

Social studies teachers have an added responsibility to help children understand their world. Moreover, the task becomes more challenging given the dynamic nature of society and the subject matter, the nature and needs of learners, and the wide variety of learning contexts in the country (Higher Education Commission Manual, 2012, p.10).

Onocha (cited in Omiyefa, 2012, p.129) identified the following as components of effective quality assurance in teacher education (including Social Studies teacher education):

1. **Quality Learners:** Healthy, well nourished, have access to school, motivated to learn and supported by their family and community.
2. **Quality Teachers:** With consideration for adequate entry qualification, course duration, pedagogical skills, motivation, curriculum offerings, internships, promotions, remunerations, number and specializations and so on.
3. **Quality Context:** With relevant curricula, adequate and appropriate materials for literacy, numeracy and essential knowledge and skills for life.
4. **Quality Teaching:** Learning process with child centred and (life) skill based approaches and technology applications like computers, projectors, to reduce disparities and promote learning.
5. **Quality Learning Environment:** (Child friendly schools), policies and practices which prohibits harassment, humiliation, violence, corporal punishment and substance abuse including adequacy of facilities and standard services. The use of e-libraries furnished with materials which align with state of the art standard classrooms as well as online modules to build teacher skills with the Library's professional development curriculum is also essential.
6. **Quality Outcomes:** With defined learning outcomes (knowledge, attitudes and skills) and suitable ways to assess them at classroom and national levels.

In like manner, certain activities and strategies are necessary in promoting professionalism among educators in the area of teaching Social Studies. These are:

- a) Developing a sense of curiosity among Student Teachers and an interest in learning more
- b) Facilitating Student Teachers to connect what they are learning to their prior knowledge and to current issues.
- d) Providing Student Teachers with the opportunities to think critically and creatively about what they are learning and to apply that learning to authentic situations (Higher Education Commission Manual, 2012, p.10).

To further ensure professionalism and quality control among teachers of Social Studies in both Primary and Secondary Schools in Nigeria, it is important to look at the National Policy on Education which is aimed at equipping teachers with the requisite principles for effective performance of their duties.

To be sure, the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004, p.33) states that the goals of teacher education shall be:

- a) To produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of our educational system.
- b) To encourage further the spirit of inquiry and creativity in teachers.
- c) To help teachers to fit into social life of the community and society at large and enhance their commitment to national goals.
- d) To provide teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and make them adaptable to changing situation.
- e) To enhance teachers' commitment to the teaching profession.

For Fareo, paying attention to the models of continuing teacher-professional development in Nigeria namely the workshop model and the school-based teacher professional support model is very important.

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She clarifies the workshop model thus:

[It] entails drawing participants out of their schools to a venue where they are exposed by experts to a core of information and skills. The workshop may be short or long-term. The nature of skills and processes to be acquired also vary. This is the most common form of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) model in Nigeria.

On the other hand, the author posits that the school-based teacher professional support or mentoring model has to do with the in-serving training of teachers while opining that:

Here, pupils, teachers, supervisors and facilitators are involved collaboratively in carrying out a series of classroom/school-based activities that will help the teacher to improve. The teacher gets professional support from facilitators and supervisors who serve as mentors. Activities may include direct classroom support by the facilitators and supervisors; staff meetings within the school and involving head-teachers and the participating teachers; demonstration lessons by teacher-educators or mentors; visits to the school by mentors (if external) (2013, p.65).

For Erant (cited in Fareo, 2013, p.65), any framework that promotes and facilitates professional learning should take the following into cognizance:

- a). An appropriate combination of learning settings (on-the-job, near the job, home, library, course etc).
- b). Time for study, consultation and reflection.
- c) The availability of suitable learning resources.
- d). People who are prepared (i.e. both willing and able) to give appropriate support).
- e) The learner's own capacity to learn and to take advantage of the opportunities available.

On his part, Peretomode (cited in Ozano, 2013, p.53) suggested six measures for raising the teaching profession to full professional status. They include:

- (1) Better teaching preparation
- (2) Registration of teachers
- (3) Improved working conditions
- (4) Enforcement of code of conduct
- (5) Professional Organization and
- (6) Long duration of training and internship.

### 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is the responsibility of the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) and the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) to partner with the Federal Government through the Federal Ministry of Education to ensure teacher-professionalism in teaching Social Studies.

It is important to note that different associations in country such as, Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT), Conference of Primary School Head-Teachers, the All Nigerian Conference of Principals of Secondary Schools (ANCOPSS), Committee of Provosts of Colleges of Education, Committee of Vice- Chancellors of Nigerian Universities, Association of Classroom Teachers, Science Teachers Association of Nigeria (STAN) Social Studies Teachers Association of Nigeria (SOSAN) and other teacher organizations need to form a synergy.

In positing the way forward, (Omiyefa, 2012, p. 136) argues that "Social Studies teachers should be constantly 'built up' as better professionals through in-service opportunities, constant workshops, conferences and seminars. However, less qualified teachers should gradually be eased out of the classroom to make way for the more qualified ones."

Other possible ways of ensuring professionalism for Social Studies Educators in Nigeria include:

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1. There should be teacher-based training in the effective use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT).
2. The curriculum of social studies should be made more attractive to motivate students and incubate future educators in the subject area. Prompt payment of salaries, allowances and areas as well as giving incentives to educators in that area will go a long way in promoting professionalism.
3. It is important to promote teacher-awards across the country. This will no doubt stimulate competition among teachers of the subject and so, make for optimum performance.
4. Since the teaching of Social Studies in secondary schools across the country is tasking and requires patriotism, policy makers should ensure that only qualified educators are allowed to teach the subject.
5. It is expedient for teacher training institutions to be adequately strengthened to respond to teachers' needs and demands.
6. There should be professional-development opportunities for teachers to continue maximum efficiency and proficiency.
7. Efforts should be put at developing a positive professional attitude among teachers such as, having high regards for the profession, upholding the teachers' code of conduct and desisting from unethical acts which are capable of tarnishing the image of the profession.
8. It is important for States and the Federal Government to review of teachers' remuneration package to stimulate hard work and promote greater professionalism among educators in Social Studies Education.
9. A suitable and convenient work-environment should be created for teachers through providing state of the art offices, good and comfortable chairs and tables as well as providing adequate facilities by education agencies, stakeholders of education and school authorities (Fareo, 2013, p.67).

### 5. CONCLUSION

The Federal Government through the Federal Ministry of Education in conjunction with teacher-based groups such as TRCN, NUT and others, need to ensure that only qualified teachers are employed to teach Social Studies in both Primary and Secondary Schools across the country.

In conclusion, promoting teachers' registration, accreditation, certification, promotion, development, discipline as well as formulating regulations for control of the teaching profession are vital in ensuring professionalism. Although giving incentives to teachers can help grow professionals in the teaching of Social Studies, the teachers themselves must be interested in the effective use of ICT related materials and also be proud of their profession seeing it as a way of contributing to national development.

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