

FOSTERING NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN NIGERIA THROUGH SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM

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Abstract

Nigeria is faced with myriad of problems which, despite its numerous natural endowments, inhibit its development and even threaten its continued existence as a sovereign state. The paper examines the role of JSS Social Studies curriculum in fostering national integration in Nigeria. The study discussed, among others, some of the factors responsible for the problems of national integration in Nigeria. It also, reviewed some conceptual issues on national integration and the reasons for the introduction of Social Studies curriculum into the school system. Thus, it revealed that Social Studies education empowers students and goes a long way toward fostering self-efficacy in them. The study also highlighted that Social Studies emphasizes good leadership and followership as necessities for national integration. This helps people to understand themselves and their ways of life thus, reducing conflicts, violence and misunderstanding in societies. It is recommended that the idea of training qualified teachers to teach the subject at the junior secondary school levels need to be looked into and that all Universities should start courses and programmes in Social Studies, ranging from Bachelor degree to Doctorate degree level.

Keywords: Curriculum, Junior secondary school, National Integration, Nigeria, Social Studies.

Introduction

Nigeria is a pluralistic and heterogeneous state with multifarious cultural, linguistic and ethnic groups. Alexius-Ugwulebo (2018) corroborates the above when he observes that Nigeria is made up of diverse cultural groups with over 400 languages and dialects and these cultural groups live in different geographical locations, so in order to ensure mutual cooperation, acceptance, understanding and peaceful co-existence among these groups, there is the need for integration. Nigeria is one of the states that owe their existence to the

imperialistic activities of Britain, which by virtue of superior culture, technology and economy subjugated people from diverse nationalities and organized them to construct Nigeria in 1914, with the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates. By the time Nigeria won her independence from Britain in 1960, its artificial origin, coupled with other factors, had bequeathed it a number of fundamental problems, one of which is the challenge of integrating, into a cohesive socio-political whole, the various entities and strange bed were lumped together by the colonialists (Ayodeii, 1997) in Uzoagba (2015).

Thus, this political ball-game which resulted in the creation of Nigeria as a single political entity brought together people of different nationalities "under a single territorial and institutional framework, and widened their social space as a result of greater inter-ethnic interaction through the institution and practice of the colonial system and thus created a common historical experience of economic, political administrative, and cultural oppression" (Adebola, 2006). Obi (2016) is of the view that ethnicity arises from the desire of individuals to organize themselves in ways to enhance their competitive efficiency in a situation where they perceive each other as competing for resources and political positions. Nonetheless, the people making up the country were not effectively integrated toward the objective of evolving a true sense of national integration and commitment to the survival and development of the nation. One factor responsible for this is the class interests and political ambitions of the "African petty bourgeoisie", the class that was to become the standard bearer of modern African nationalism (Adeboia, 2006).

Nigerian education system should be imbued with values of national integration. The essence of any type of education is to equip the learner with the necessary knowledge, capacities or skills to effectively and efficiently confront certain problems that confront him/her within his /her environment. This is to say that education is a problems solving adventure. Education is said to have yielded positive fruits when it has helped man to solve moral, social, physical, economic, psychological and political problems facing him so that he can live in peace and harmony with his environment.

Social Studies as an academic discipline is concerned with the inculcation of basic knowledge, skills as well as values and right attitudes that enable Nigerian students, at all levels of education, to fit into Nigerian environment properly and as well as contribute to national peace, integration, progress and well-being of all Nigerians (Okogu&Umudjere, 2016). It is a programme of study in which students are exposed to carefully selected physical and social environmental

realities within built packages for the development of the skills of various kinds of nurturing of values, attitudes, culture and actions conducive to the continued orderly survival of the society (Zaria & Tsebee, 2016).

Integration in a pluralistic and heterogeneous society like Nigeria is one of the major concerns of Social Studies as an academic discipline in Nigerian secondary school education system. This is because integration is a prerequisite for socio-political, economic, cultural, technological and holistic development of the Nigerian nation. According to Tijani and Msheliza (2015), integration is viewed as bringing people together in such a way that they have sense of belonging to the same destiny. Obi (2008) cited in Tijani and Msheliza (2015) sees integration as a state or condition of an organization or substance and interactive adjustment, the physiological, physical, emotional and mutual process with the environment.

Nigeria needs education that will integrate all her citizens from different cultural backgrounds into one strong indivisible entity and make them become fully aware of the numerous socio-economic and political problems of the country and of the world in general and to appreciate the inter dependence between people. No other academic discipline does this better than Social Studies education (Odiye, 2016).

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

National integration theory of Mezieobi (1995) in Ebirim and Uzoagba (2018). The theory explains that nation building becomes a lot much easier in the face of workable and functional integration. National integration is a state of fusion or harmonious interaction and interrelation of persons and groups within a nation to make an identifiable single entry with common goals which include nation building accomplishment.

The national integration theory can be viewed from two ways, firstly as a fusion of culturally, economically, socially, politically and ethnically desperate groups in a given political setting into a closely knit cohesive groups that is geared towards building a territorial nationality.

Secondly, the theory can be seen as a workflow in which efficiency or ineffectiveness in one phase of overall work production process affects the other parts from these analysis, it can be deduced that nation building involves individuals, various organizations, government, economy and forces of change working cooperatively to achieve nation building goals.

This theory is in line with the study which emphasized that for Nigeria to achieve national integration there is need for mutual cooperation, acceptance of one another, understanding, accommodation and peaceful co-existence among these different ethnic groups.

Conceptual Development

Concept of Social Studies Education

Social Studies is a popular school subject that studies man in relationship with those variables that make up physical and social environment. It deals with the study of man's influence on his social environment and how environmental factors influence to a great extent, his decision making process (Tijani & Msheliza, 2015). The objectives of Social Studies, among others, is to ensure the acquisition of the relevant body of knowledge and information which is an essential prerequisite to personal development and the making of positive contribution to the betterment of the society as a whole (Tijani & Msheliza, 2015).

In line with this, the NPE (2004) stresses that the curriculum content for Social Studies education should include the inculcation of social norms, spirit of enquiry, creativity through exploration of nature, the environment, arts and music co-operation and team spirit and also good health. Thus, the acquisition of all these attribute enable students, develop positive and functional mindset required for national integration. Zwalchir and Obanya (2001) report that Social Studies transmits culture through dramatization, role-play and discussion in the class, and as well enable students learn the positive value of caring and sharing which are the indices for national integration.

Furthermore, Social Studies emphasizes good leadership and followership as a necessity for national integration. As children learn to be good leaders of their communities right from their early ages, this will make them good leaders not only of their communities but wherever they find themselves, since they have been exposed to the traditional system of leadership in the different ethnic groups in the country (Apebende, Egong and Unwa-Unyin, 2008). Also, Ebirim, Emenyeonu & Uzoagba (2013) has it that Social Studies promotes tolerance, love, honesty, accommodation and good relationship among people in the family, community and different ethnic groups. These variables according to them are instruments of national integration. They also maintained that Social Studies can be taught in the school with the use of film and slides shown in the classroom and through role playing.

Similarly, research evidence has shown that Social Studies is an interdisciplinary integration of social science and humanity concepts for the purpose of practicing problem-solving and decision-making, for developing citizenship skills on critical social issues (Zarillo, 2004).

Nigeria's Education Philosophy and National Integration

Nigeria aims at national integration and the inculcation of good interpersonal and human relations as cardinal aspects of her educational goals. Her philosophy and belief are expressed in her commitment to educational policy on education, that education is an instrument “per excellence” for effective national development and integration. This is clearly spelt out in National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) cited in Harry (2019) that for the benefit of all citizens, the country's educational goals shall be relevant to the needs of all individuals and the society and in keeping with the realities of our environment. In the light of the above, the quality of instruction at all levels is to embody values such as:

- i. Respect for the worth and dignity of all individuals
- ii. Faith in man's ability to make national decision
- iii. Moral and spiritual principles in interpersonal and human relations
- iv. Shared responsibility for common good of the society
- v. Promotion of the physical and psychological development of all children and above all
- vi. Acquisition of competencies necessary for selfreliance

The acquisition of the above values, no doubt, will build in the students the capacity and skills to contribute significantly to Nigerian national integration and unity. A good educational system guarantees good citizenry, which in turn culminates in social economic and political growth as well as stability (Asogwa (2019), This is because education helps people work better and create opportunities for sustainable and viable economic growth now and in the future. Education is the pivot of general human activities and the driver to most great economies of the world (Eluwa& Uko, 2020).

The Rationale for the Introduction of Social Studies into the Nigeria School System

The introduction of Social Studies education was induced by generally the wave of curriculum reforms that swept across the country since Nigerian independence. It is a response towards a goal-oriented education. Ezegbe (2008). He maintained that traditional system of education seem to be teacher-oriented, as it lays emphasis on subject based and content laden discipline. He further

stated that modern system of education is more preferred as accepted for being child-centered, recognition of learners' interest, needs and individual difference and capabilities. This modern system is more recognized for providing situations that stimulate curiosity, problem-solving exploitation, discovery, creativity and self-expression.

Ebirim & Uzoagba (2011) opined that another reason for the introduction of Social Studies education into the Nigerian school system was borne out the desire to make education responsive to the needs of the society. They observed that Social Studies integrated approach will be suitable in helping the learner understand the society better, in terms of interrelatedness of social realities. They further stated that an integrated subject would help the learner solve his problems in life.

Similarly, Ezegebe(2008) stated that education through an integrated Social Studies programme, will be more effective in the country than through separate subject disciplines. This claims is based on the assumption that Social Studies is an integrated programme, that looks at the life of the child in the society as a totality and not as compartmentalized as an approach through the separate social science discipline would depict. Furthermore he maintained that Social Studies is more adequate that separate social subjects in terms of content and scope, for the development of National consciousness and promotion of unity. He observed that Social Studies helps youths to understand the Nigerian society, its peoples and their problems and equip them with the knowledge, understanding and necessary competencies that will assist them in improving the society.

To achieve the goals for the introduction of Social Studies in Nigeria, there is need to teach the subject at all levels of educational system so as to produce the needed man-power that will effectively transmit Social Studies objectives into realities (Olisa, 2018).

The Impact of Social Studies Curriculum on the Learner:

The National Council for Social Studies (1994) in expectation of excellence suggests curriculum standards for Social Studies students, which includes how to become good citizens, how to help learners have proper information about the society, know ways of political participation, have knowledge on how the country is being governed, maintain discipline and orderliness, honest services and dedication to duty, be patriotic and learn the skills of good leadership and followership (Ebirim&Uzoagba, 2011).

In the same vein, Ebirim, Emenyonu&Uzoagba (2018) opined that Social Studies education emphasized that all Nigerian irrespective of tribe, language or religion must learn to move along with others whose background, attitude, interest and orientations are different. They also maintained that students must be trained to cultivate good social relationship and learn how to live with friend irrespective of ethnic difference.

Laying credence to the above, Mackin (2003) stated that Social Studies must recognize and apply spatial relationship as analytical tools. Empathize with other people and appreciate their activities as intelligent adaptations to time and place (Brophy, Alleman and Omahony, 2003).

Similarly, Ezegbe (2008) pointed out that Social Studies education helps students in the development of modern democratic values which are prerequisites for achieving national integration. He emphasized that language is an aspect of culture, an integral part of Social Studies and a veritable tool for national integration. In line with this, Mode (2000) states that Nigeria has recognized the fact that language is an important cultural factor of unity, that is why it is stated in the National Policy On Education (2004) that in the interest of national unity it is expedient that every child shall be required to learn one of the three major Nigerian languages,

On greetings, Apebende, Egong and Unwa-Unyin (2008) pointed that people exchange greetings in all parts of the country but the style differs from tribe to tribe. In the Eastern part of the country, youths normally salute their elders with two hands joined together, While in the west, Youths normally prostrate to salute their elders with enough respect. Even though there are differences in their styles of greetings, students are exposed to all of them through Social Studies so that they will know when and where to use which style in order to feel at home. Through Social Studies, students learn the efferent ways of dressing of people from different cultural backgrounds. Social Studies also helps in cultural integration by exposing students to know that there are different festivals celebrated by the different ethnic groups and that none is more important than the other. Social Studies teach students not to look down on any festival celebrated by any other group of people but they should know that such a festival is as important as theirs. Students also learn that there are different styles of dancing, music, and drumming rhythms among Nigerians. They could learn these through role play, dramatization, and film shows in the classroom. All these help students to develop the spirit of understanding, cooperation, tolerance and oneness, which are yardsticks for achieving national integration.

National Integration and Social Studies Education

There is a certain degree of consistency in the various attempts to conceptualize the notion of national integration. National integration describes the development of identification with the national community that supersedes in certain situations more parochial loyalties. It is the progressive lessening of ethnic, cultural and regional tensions and discontinuities in the process of influencing, modifying and changing pupil's behaviour in the direction of acceptable norms, values, beliefs, attitudes and practices of the society. It was on this opinion that the first consideration governing the rationale for the introduction of Social Studies in the school system was conceived, (Ezegbe, 2008).

Secondly, it was believed that Social Studies emphasizes its effects and that its content derives from multiple interactions of man in his environment. For example, encounters with natural, spiritual, cultural, economic and technological elements in the society. Interactions/relationships form the core of Social Studies, and interactions have many ramifications and manifestations, carrying with them multiple and diverse problems. So, school Social Studies curriculum concentrates on problem-solving orientation. The content of the curriculum took a topical approach and it developed around a set of socio-political, historical, economic and geographical themes, Facts, concepts, generalizations and other units of information do not in themselves constitute the content to be taught but they form the vehicle by which positive ideas, values, skills and affects are developed, acquired and internalized. This is the basis of the problem-solving approach adopted in the curriculum (Olawepo, 1997).

Indices for Measuring National Integration

The level and standard of national integration in every country is determined by how well such country has achieved social, political and economic integration. These tripod organs, when adequately developed, result to a whole, viable and functional national integration. In this vein, those indices for national integration are discussed thus.

Economic Integration

Economic Integration, describes a situation where all the component aspects of an economy are brought together and aligned in such an orderly way that they work harmoniously, more effectively in a country like Nigeria (Fan, 2004). This implies that the production, distribution, transportation, communication and other economic systems are orderly organized to ensure maximum economic

satisfaction in the country, Dike (2008). Similarly, Ikoku (1980) in Uzoagba (2008) stressed the fact that economic integration is meant to ensure the following attributes:

1. The satisfaction of basic human needs and this also involves a meaningful participation of the masses in the shaping of economic and social change.
2. The policies of self-reliance should be encouraged with emphasis on self-confidence and creative use of local resources, man-power, technology and the growing stress on collective self-reliance and co-operation among its citizens.
3. Achieving bold, harmonized policy and institutional measures to promote both internal and external trade relationship.

Dike (2008) highlighted economic integration as another facet of nation building which is based on equitable distribution of wealth/resources. This means, the ability to use the resources from an area to develop the area. For instance, oil revenue from the Niger Delta should be used to develop the Niger Delta area first before moving to other parts of the country.

Political Integration

Political integration is described as the coming together of individuals who have decided to work as a united group to achieve whatever is their political objectives (Akinboro 1981) in Uzoagba (2008). He went further to emphasize that different political parties are made of up individuals who dropped their personal idiosyncrasies and come together to work as a team, so as to achieve their articulated political goals. Similarly, Ebirim (2006) described the formation of political parties in Nigeria that cut across ethnic lines as raising hope for political integration. He further explained that if Nigerians would imbibe the spirit of political integration among themselves, it will foster national unity and development.

Social Integration

Ohueri (2019) opined that national integration is not a mathematical exercise of putting together the separate parts or physical elements to make a whole, rather it involves bringing together human beings who have emotions, feelings and sentiments. There are bound to be conflicts and disagreements in the management of the affairs of members of such a heterogeneous society. National integration therefore acts as an instrument that will socialize the youths towards character formation and imbibing good citizenship education that will be patriotic enough to contribute to community development and nation building.

Problems of National Integrations

Ifeanacho and Nwagwu (2009) opined that national integration crisis in Nigeria is manifest in the minority question, religious conflicts, ethnic politics, resource control, youth restiveness and the call for sovereign national conference. These have jointly generated the disintegration of the productive sector, and the institution of food insecurity, social in-security, deterioration of the physical and social infrastructures, fall in the living standards of a vast majority- of Nigerians and their alienation from the political system. Similarly, Ibaba (2009) noted that the greatest of the challenges facing Nigeria today is the threat to national unity. These challenges take the form of quest for resource control and self determination, ethnicity based identity politics and religious intolerance among people in different religious groups.

Observably, the problem of integration is so recurrent in Africa that the existence of many of its countries as viable national entities is subject to doubt. The threats to national cohesion assume many forms, including ethnic, regional, religious and class cleavages, political killings, increased cases of kidnapping, to name a few. Giving credence to this, Various people such as Okiro (2008), Etim (2009), and Odah (2009) also observed that the state of security of life and property in Nigeria is highly lamentable and nothing to write home about. There has been growing insecurity; an increase in the Deigning cases of broad day-light robberies, hired assassination and the most recent bomb attacks in parts of the country and religious crises in the North. In addition, there are the destructive demonstration of the militants in the pre-amnesty period and other grave problems besetting the country. Although, Nigeria does not have a monopoly of these problems, but it is fair to say that it has exhibited the most acute cases in contemporary history. The persistent social discord and instability renders meaningless the numerous attempts to find lasting solutions to the problems that face Nigeria, society; such as poverty, pestilence, illiteracy, inadequate social infrastructure, poor health, unemployment and political disenfranchisement. All this and more could make it difficult the building of structures for solving these problems on solid ground.

Efforts by the Nigerian Government to Achieve National Integration

The issue of national integration for coordinated comprehensive national development cannot be overemphasized. The task of national building in a pluralist society like Nigeria is an arduous one. Owing to this, the Nigerian leadership has made determined efforts to weld the various ethnic groups together since the country's independence in 1960. In the educational sector, the government has continued to expand educational facilities at all levels and have

continued to encourage the admission of students from various ethnic groups, particularly at the secondary and university education levels respectively. This programme of expansion involved the establishment of what people usually refer to as "Unity schools" in all the states of Nigeria. Recruitment into these schools is based on quota from all the states. Although these schools have been criticized and perceived as schools for the children of the elite class, it is regarded as a worthwhile effort by many people. In these schools there is interaction and mutual understanding among students and their friendship pattern are not ethnically based.

In addition to Federal Government Colleges, the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) was set up to take care of admission into higher institutions of learning. Students involvement into these institutions, particularly the universities, reflect the federal character of Nigeria. Other efforts made to enhance national integration are:

1. The launching of the National Youth Service Corps in (1973). The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme is designed to mobilize the young university graduates towards national integration but the unfortunate thing about it is that it focused on a small segment of the population. It concerns only University graduates who constitute only a small percentage of the Nigeria populace.
2. The creation of states in the country. This is a policy that has given the minority ethnic groups a sense of belonging and has helped to shift the power base from the states to the centre. With power base tilting in favour of the centre, it is now not possible for any state to hold the entire country to ransom as happened in the past. While the creation of states is seen as a programme designed to generate an atmosphere of stability and unity among Nigerians, it has introduced a new element into the politics of Nigeria.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design.. This was carried out in Owerri Education Zone I of Imo State. The population of the study was 1023 JSS social studies teachers in Owerri Education Zone I of Imo State. The sample of the study was 102 (10% of population) JSS social studies teachers were drawn through stratified proportionate sampling technique. The instrument, Fostering National Integration through Social Studies Curriculum Questionnaire (FNISSCQ) was developed by the researcher, validated by three specialists. The reliability coefficient obtained for the FNISSCQ was 0.76 using Cronbach Alpha method. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. Any

mean value greater than the criterion mean value of 2.50 falls within the range of large extent, otherwise, it falls within the range of small extent.

Results

Table 1: Extent to which mutual cooperation as a social studies value can be used to achieve national integration in Nigeria

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Mutual cooperation among ethnic groups significantly contributes to national unity in Nigeria	3.36	0.673	Large Extent
2	Teamwork and collaboration among Nigerians help reduce ethnic and regional tensions	3.36	0.673	Large Extent
3	Mutual cooperation in economic activities (e.g., trade, business partnerships) promotes national integration	3.70	0.656	Large Extent
4	Government policies that promote cooperation among different communities enhance national integration	3.29	0.656	Large Extent
5	Social studies education encourages young people to embrace mutual cooperation for national unity	3.08	0.544	Large Extent
	Grand Mean	3.36	0.640	Large Extent

The Table 1 shows that mutual cooperation is widely regarded as essential for national integration in Nigeria, with a grand mean of 3.36 indicating a large extent of agreement among respondents. The highest-rated item (mean = 3.70) highlights the role of economic collaboration, such as trade and business partnerships, in fostering unity. Government policies promoting cooperation (mean = 3.29) and teamwork among Nigerians (mean = 3.36) are also seen as

significant factors. While social studies education's role (mean = 3.08) is acknowledged, it is perceived as less impactful compared to economic and policy-driven initiatives. The low standard deviation values indicate consistency in responses, emphasizing the need for strengthened cooperation through education, economic policies, and government initiatives to enhance national unity.

Table 2: Extent to which peaceful co-existence as a social studies value can be used to achieve national integration in Nigeria

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Peaceful co-existence among different ethnic groups promotes national integration in Nigeria	2.91	0.829	Large Extent
2	Living in harmony with people of different cultural backgrounds strengthens national unity	3.08	0.717	Large Extent
3	Encouraging peaceful interactions among Nigerians helps to reduce ethnic and religious conflicts	2.78	0.623	Large Extent
4	Social studies education plays a significant role in promoting peaceful co-existence among Nigerians	2.65	1.027	Large Extent
5	Government policies that encourage peaceful co-existence contribute to stronger national unity	2.76	1.004	Large Extent
	Grand Mean	2.84	0.840	Large Extent

The Table 2 indicates that peaceful co-existence is perceived to a large extent as a crucial factor in achieving national integration in Nigeria, with a grand mean of 2.84. The highest-rated item (mean = 3.08) emphasizes that living in harmony with people of different cultural backgrounds strengthens national unity. Similarly, peaceful interactions among Nigerians (mean = 2.78) and

government policies encouraging peaceful co-existence (mean = 2.76) are also seen as important contributors. Social studies education's role in promoting peaceful co-existence (mean = 2.65) is acknowledged but rated lower, suggesting it may be less emphasized in practice. The standard deviation values indicate moderate variation in responses, reflecting differing perceptions among respondents. Thus, the findings highlight the importance of fostering peaceful co-existence through education, policies, and cultural interactions to enhance national unity.

Table 3: Extent to which acceptance of one another by different ethnic groups as a social studies value can be used to achieve national integration in Nigeria

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Acceptance of people from different ethnic backgrounds promotes unity and national integration in Nigeria	2.36	0.919	Small Extent
2	Encouraging inter-ethnic relationships and cooperation helps to strengthen national unity	2.57	0.650	Large Extent
3	Social studies education plays a vital role in fostering acceptance among different ethnic groups in Nigeria	3.19	0.612	Large Extent
4	Reducing ethnic discrimination and stereotypes enhances peaceful co-existence and national development	3.02	0.441	Large Extent
5,	Government policies that promote acceptance and inclusivity contribute to stronger national integration	3.08	0.717	Large Extent
	Grand Mean	2.84	0.668	Large Extent

The Table 3 shows that acceptance among different ethnic groups is generally seen as important for national integration in Nigeria, with a grand mean of 2.84, indicating a large extent of agreement. The highest-rated item (mean = 3.19) highlights the role of social studies education in fostering ethnic acceptance, while reducing ethnic discrimination and stereotypes (mean = 3.02) and government policies promoting inclusivity (mean = 3.08) are also considered significant. However, the acceptance of people from different ethnic backgrounds (mean = 2.36) is rated at a small extent, suggesting that ethnic divisions still pose a challenge to national unity. The standard deviation values indicate some variability in responses, reflecting diverse opinions. Thus, the findings emphasize the need for stronger educational, social, and policy-driven efforts to promote ethnic acceptance and national integration.

Table 4: Extent to which respect for different religion as a social studies value can be used to achieve national integration in Nigeria

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Respect for different religious beliefs and practices promotes peace and national integration in Nigeria	2.97	0.442	Large Extent
2	Encouraging inter-religious tolerance and understanding helps to foster unity and cooperation among Nigerians	2.78	0.413	Large Extent
3	Social studies education plays a crucial role in teaching respect for different religions in Nigeria	2.97	0.441	Large Extent
4	Reducing religious discrimination and promoting inclusivity enhances peaceful co-existence and national development	3.31	0.471	Large Extent
5	Government policies that promote religious freedom and harmony contribute to stronger national integration	3.08	0.717	Large Extent
	Grand Mean	3.02	0.497	Large Extent

The Table 4 indicates that respect for different religions is widely regarded as a key factor in achieving national integration in Nigeria, with a grand mean of 3.02, signifying a large extent of agreement among respondents. The highest-rated item (mean = 3.31) emphasizes that reducing religious discrimination and promoting inclusivity enhance peaceful co-existence and national development. Similarly, government policies that promote religious freedom (mean = 3.08) and social studies education in fostering religious respect (mean = 2.97) are also seen as important contributors to national unity. Encouraging inter-religious tolerance (mean = 2.78) is acknowledged, though rated slightly lower. The low standard deviation values suggest consistency in responses. Thus, the findings highlight the importance of education, policies, and social efforts in promoting religious respect as a means to strengthen national integration in Nigeria.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings reveal that mutual cooperation, peaceful co-existence, ethnic acceptance, and religious respect are crucial social studies values that contribute to national integration in Nigeria. Mutual cooperation was widely acknowledged as a significant factor in fostering unity, particularly through economic collaboration, teamwork, and supportive government policies. According to Tijani and Msheliza (2015), economic interdependence among diverse groups strengthens national cohesion by reducing ethnic tensions and promoting shared interests. Social studies education was also recognized for its role in encouraging cooperation, though its impact was perceived as secondary to economic and policy-driven initiatives.

Peaceful co-existence was identified as essential for national integration, with respondents emphasizing the importance of living harmoniously with people from different cultural backgrounds. This aligns with the argument by Uzoagba (2008) that cultural tolerance is fundamental to reducing ethnic and religious conflicts. While social studies education was acknowledged as a tool for promoting peaceful co-existence, its perceived effectiveness suggests that it may not be fully implemented in practice. The findings indicate that fostering peaceful interactions and developing policies that encourage harmony among ethnic groups can enhance national unity.

Ethnic acceptance was also regarded as an important factor, with social studies education playing a major role in fostering inter-ethnic relationships. However, the relatively lower perception of general acceptance of people from different ethnic backgrounds suggests that ethnic divisions remain a significant challenge. This is consistent with Asogwa (2019), who emphasized that ethnic bias and stereotypes continue to hinder social cohesion in Nigeria. Reducing discrimination and implementing inclusive policies were identified as essential steps toward fostering national unity.

Respect for different religions was widely seen as a key factor in achieving national integration. Respondents highlighted the importance of reducing religious discrimination and promoting inclusivity, which aligns with the argument by Okogu and Umudjere (2016) that interfaith tolerance is crucial for building a united society. Social studies education was recognized for its role in fostering religious respect, though policy-driven approaches were perceived as slightly more impactful. The findings emphasize the need for policies that promote religious harmony and educational initiatives that instill respect for diverse beliefs.

Thus, the study supports the view that mutual cooperation, peaceful co-existence, ethnic acceptance, and religious respect are key values for national integration. However, while social studies education plays a role in promoting these values, its perceived impact suggests a need for stronger curriculum implementation and policy support. The results align with existing literature, indicating that fostering cooperation, reducing discrimination, and promoting tolerance are essential for achieving national unity in Nigeria.

Conclusion/Recommendations

The findings highlight that mutual cooperation, peaceful co-existence, ethnic acceptance, and religious respect are crucial for national integration in Nigeria. While economic collaboration and policy-driven initiatives play significant roles, deep-rooted ethnic divisions remain a challenge. Social studies education contributes to fostering these values, but its impact needs strengthening. Effective national integration requires a multifaceted approach, including improved education, inclusive policies, and efforts to promote inter-group tolerance and mutual respect.

The quest for national integration has occupied a place of prominence in Nigeria's political and administrative scheme of things since her independence in 1960. Thus several research efforts have been made to identify the associated problems, causes and means for achieving a functional national integration. In this regard, this study has shown that JSS Social Studies curriculum is a veritable instrument for achieving national integration. Social Studies curriculum transmits culture through dramatization, role-play and or discussion in the class, teaches good citizenship education and as well enable students learn the positive value of caring and sharing which are the indices for national integration. Also, Social Studies has the special focus of positively influencing, modifying and changing students behaviour in the direction of acceptable norms, values, beliefs, attitudes and practices of the society. The following recommendations were made;

1. The government should strengthen policies that promote mutual cooperation, peaceful co-existence, and inclusivity through economic collaboration, educational reforms, and community engagement programs.
2. Social studies education should be enhanced to place greater emphasis on fostering ethnic acceptance, religious respect, and national unity through practical learning experiences and inter-group activities.
3. Government should provide employment opportunities for the teeming unemployed youths by building more industries across the Nation that can absorb youths and thereby curb the problem of youth restiveness, kidnapping, political killing and religious tolerance,
4. Environmental courses like Social Studies should be taught at all levels of educational system in Nigeria, because it is a tool for citizenship education which prepares the individual to acquire skills that will make him become self-reliant in the society.
5. It is also recommended that only qualified Social Studies teachers should be allowed to teach the subject. This is because if the subject is taught by specialists in the area, there will be effective translation of Social Studies objectives into realities.
6. Governmental should fund Unity Schools properly because it is an environment where youths of diverse ethnic groups can be taught on how to embrace unity, tolerance, acceptance and accommodation so that they can champion the course of national development.

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