

The Evolution of Social Studies in Namibia: Continuity and Change

Christian Nekare

Lecturer, University of Namibia

Email: cnekare@unam.na

Abstract

The introduction of Social Studies (SS) into the national curricula of Namibia has seen it evolved into a very diverse and adaptable subject, with a wide range of topics to study. It is now a major subject at primary and tertiary levels of the education system. There is widespread agreement among Social Studies educators (Uche, 1980; Okobiah, 1984 and Awopetu, 1995) that the subject directly deals with humankind and the society in which they live. This notion carries the special responsibility of preparing children to become well-informed and constructive participants in society, capable of developing healthy and social relationships. This article analyzes the evolution of Social Studies in Namibia and traces its global acquaintances. In addition, Social Studies remain unexplored in the Namibian context and operate under conditions that are seriously under-resourced. The article concludes by highlighting some of the way forward for Social Studies in Namibia.

Keywords: Evolution, Social Studies, Namibia, Continuity, Change

Introduction

Noble scholars have written extensively on the concepts of Social Studies (Ross, 2020, Okon and Nseabasi, 2023 and Jone, 1908). The National Council for Social Studies (2015) describes Social Studies as integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. According to Chinoda (2000), Social Studies is an interdisciplinary subject with a contemporary orientation and a focus upon personal and social problems. Thus, it is not one subject, but integration or coming together of those subjects which help us to understand human life and society, these subjects include: Geography, History, Civics, Sociology, Economics, Anthropology and Arts. Complimentary, we argue that Social Studies, as a school subject focuses on human relationships and behaviours. It primarily concerned with the study of the people, their activities and relationships, as they interact with one another and with their physical and socio-cultural environment to advance their needs. Furthermore, it is a learning which fosters the development of social concepts, general social awareness and the understanding of modern industrial society.

However, there are no universally accepted definitions of Social Studies because of the eclectic nature of the discipline (Abubakar,2019). Defining social studies is a complex

scholarly exercise entangled between diverse concepts and ideologies across continents and countries. These several definitions of Social Studies affect the evolution of Social Studies (Bestor, 1953 and Keller, 1991), to one that identifies Social Studies as encompassing all other subjects (Stanley & Nelson, 1994). Even the name of Social Studies has been the center of attention since its birth (Nelson, 2001). Over the past decades, Social Studies have suffered from being interpreted either too widely or too narrowly (Saxe, 2004 and Gibson, 2010). The development of Social Studies curriculum involves a multifaceted process that requires an inclusive approach (Barton and Levstik, 2004). Hence, Social Studies tackle issues that are challenging for human survival. In different parts of the world, the description of Social Studies varies from time to time and from place to place, including its objectives depending on the needs, aspirations and desires of people (Bertrand, 2004; Amos, 2014). For example, some countries cluster it as cultural studies, oriental studies, environmental studies, citizenship education and social science. In addition, the United States of America (USA) which has been mapped as the "mother" country of Social Studies (Obebe, 1990), has no national Social Studies syllabus for the whole country, but each school district writes its own Social Studies syllabus. From its inception, Social Studies have been contested over time (Evans, 2004). This debate was over the curriculum content (Kliebard, 2004) especially, in the third world countries.

Moreover, after several conferences held in the USA, Britain and Africa, Social Studies became part of the school curricula in many African countries. Outstanding among them was the meeting held at Queen's College, Oxford with delegation from USA, Britain and Africa. This was followed by the pivotal 1968 Mombassa Conference held in Kenya. Several subject specialists from eleven African countries: Nigeria, Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia attended. These conferences discussed a variety of needs and priorities for Social Studies curriculum development in Africa, particularly at primary, secondary, and teacher training level. As part of these initiatives, African countries introduced Social Studies as part of their national curricula.

Remarkably, Africa launched the establishment of a Centre based in Nairobi, Kenya called African Social Studies Programme (ASSP) later renamed to African Social and Environmental Studies Programme (ASESP), to promote a better understanding of Social Studies, disseminate content and to co-ordinate activities related to the development of Social Studies in Africa. So far, African countries have embraced Social Studies and have expanded the nature and the scope of the subject. Today, the subject is parallel across Africa, as demonstrated in Namibia, Social Studies has been seen as capable of promoting democratic and technological values (Social Studies Phase Syllabus Grade 4 - 7, 2015).

Despite the relevance of adapting Social Studies in school as a major subject for molding good citizens, its teaching and learning remains complex, some of which are new, while others are old. Another problem is the divergence in the implementation of Social Studies across the regions and clusters. There are also several questions on the role of Social Studies in contemporary Namibia. Some of these questions touch on subject evolution,

curriculum issues, pedagogies, resources and teachers' competence. This is necessary because it has been noticed that for many Namibian schools, Social Studies has limited educational infrastructure. The Social Studies teachers have less knowledge on different levels of conceptualization and curriculum frameworks. To close this gap, it is necessary for the Namibian Social Studies teacher to know how the subject has evolved. Therefore, this article addresses Social Studies in Namibia, describing its evolution. By reflecting on this development, teachers would have a better understanding of Social Studies. The remainder of this article is structured as follows: Section 2 outlines the methodology. Section 3 on the concepts of Social Studies: content, components and methods of inquiry. Section 4 deals on emergence of Social Studies in Namibia. Section 4 provides a discussion. The last section concludes the way forward for social studies in Namibia.

Methodology

This article utilized a qualitative and interpretive approach, drawing upon historical analysis and policy review to examine the evolution of Social Studies in Namibia. The methodology overlaps three core research areas: document analysis, policy review, and thematic interpretation. The first step focused on the systematic analysis of secondary sources. These included government reports, national basic education curriculum, continuous assessment manual for Social Studies, national subject guide for Social Studies, Social Studies syllabus, towards improving continuous assessment in schools-policy and information guide 1999, National standard and performance indicator for school in Namibia and academic publications. The documents were sourced from the Ministry of Education and online sources. Emphasis was placed on identifying key reforms that defined the emergence of Social Studies after independence in 1990. This was followed by an in-depth analysis of key Namibian legislation and national development policies, including the Vision 2030, NDP-6, Basic Education act 3 of 2020, education regulations, and frameworks guiding Social Studies development. The review examined how these policies have enriched Social Studies. The data collected through documents and policy review were analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns, discourses, and gaps in the emergence of Social Studies in Namibia. This thematic interpretation enabled the researchers to critically assess how Social Studies evolved in Namibia.

Objectives

The article addresses Social Studies in Namibia, describing its evolution through a historical analysis.

Concept of Social Studies: content, components and methods of inquiry

Social Studies can be characterized as a concept worried about the training of social relations and the activity of society (Gajere, 2015). Social Studies consist of the facts selected from the reservoir of data coming from various disciplines of social sciences to be used for instructional purposes. In the 21st century, Social Studies has evolved from memorisation domain to life orientation science that cultivates diverse content. Social

studies should never be considered as synonymous with Social Sciences. Social Studies differ from Social Sciences in that it follows an inter-disciplinary approach (Ausburg,2006) and is based on content drawn from various Social Sciences disciplines such as geography, history etc. Social Sciences on the other hand, comprise academic disciplines concerned with the study of the social life of human groups, animals and individuals (Mastle, 2000). Each of these subjects is taken and treated as a separate entity. For example, geography is taught separately from History subject. Social sciences are to be taught at high school and college level while Social Studies are simplified portions of social sciences to be taught at primary level.

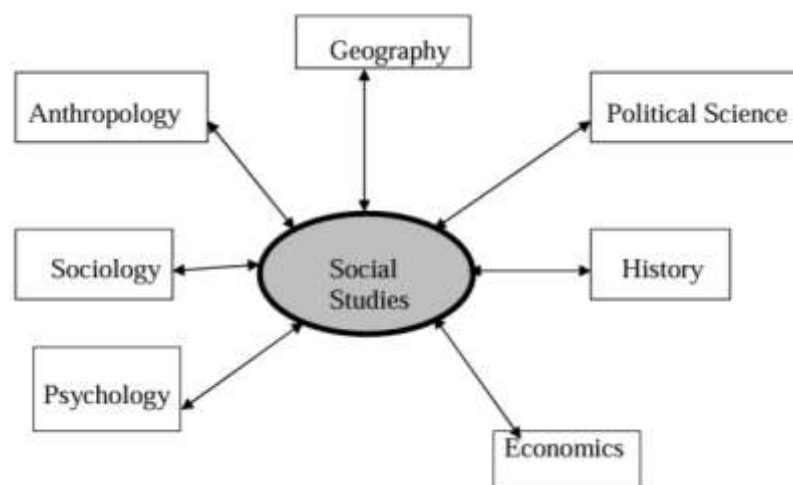


Figure 1: Scope of Social Studies in Relation to Other Disciplines

Figure I shows the interrelationship of Social Studies with other disciplines in terms of scope. The contents of Social Studies merge information, ideas, and topics the teacher is expected to teach in a Social Studies classroom. These are the topics covered in Social Studies as a subject and included in the Social Studies curriculum. The content is related to the aims, goals, and objectives of the subject. Therefore, the Contents of Social Studies are created in a manner in which the aims and objectives of Social Studies are measurable. The topics included in Social Studies support the societal norms and values and are categorized under facts, concepts, generalization, skills, values, and attitude relevant to the student's age and level to enhance the growth and development of society (Syafuruddin, Fadhilah, Fara. Rahmawati, Aulia, Komalasari, Anita,Rizqan, Nur, 2024).

Social Studies prepares learners to navigate a technology-paced world. It puts contemporary issues in context and fosters deep understanding of these complex issues. Social Studies curriculum has increased participation (Wineburg & Martin, 2009), relevance (Crisolo, Camposano and Rogayan, 2021), and sense of community (Hensley, 2021) and learners have a deeper awareness of their surrounding cultural environment (Adesina, 2013). The subject is recognized for offering rewarding learning opportunities. Social Studies flexibility is essential as teachers can be current on curricular issues, improvise their teaching and gain subject matter.

In Namibian primary school, Social Studies deal with the study of the relationship of man to society, government and environment. In Grade 1-3, Social Studies is formally known as Environmental Studies. The emphasis is on civic, immediate environment, local health, local communities and culture. Grade 4 the contents are expanded to include basic geography, history, and civic duties. The focus is on identifying physical features, local communities, and cultivating culturally tolerant citizens. In Grade 5, the emphasis is on integrating history, geography, and civics into a single subject that promotes model citizenship and regional neighborhood. In Grade 6, focuses on integrating history, geography, economics, and sociology to build productive citizens. Content carries regional (Southern Africa), and global perspectives. In Grade 7, advanced history, geography, and civics to foster active citizenship and environmental awareness. Emphasizes four core themes: map work & climatology, evolution of humankind, resource management & sustainability and civics & human Rights. The components of Social Studies are primarily divided into three educational domains: the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. Together, they provide a holistic approach to teaching and learning Social Studies. These are three sides of the same coin. They are related with each other as well as different from each other in many ways. The subject matter is rooted in framework such as cognitive development, moral development, psychosocial stages of human growth and development, social constructivism, and socio-cultural development.

Methods of inquiry refer to the philosophical framework of any given subject. It also pertains to the general operation that a teacher observes when he teaches a subject. It includes the various strategies, techniques and materials to be used. The discovery approach, the learners are assisted to look for the answers to their problems under the effective guidance of the teacher. Process approach, the main purpose of this approach is to develop various skills among the pupils. The said skills may be simple or complex. The purpose of process approach is to equip the pupils with necessary skills they need to solve problems they encounter in life at present or in the future. Inquiry approach, the purpose of this approach is to develop the learner's interest in inquiring or asking questions about a given material, situation or subject being studied. The ability to ask questions or to inquire is one salient skill that a teacher should develop among learners. Integrated approach, there are many issues surrounding the environment of the learners. These issues should be included in the lessons under Social Studies. Multimedia approach, teachers should make use of all forms of media from pictures to films in order to arouse the interest of the pupils and to generate concrete learning, for obvious reasons. Value clarification approach, the purpose is to clarify the value chosen by the learners. A pupil should not be criticized for choosing a negative value. Instead, the teacher should try his best to redirect his value toward the positive through skillful teaching as explained earlier. Interdisciplinary approach, teachers must not limit students learning in Social Studies alone. They should relate their subject to other disciplines like science, math, music, art and other areas. Mastery learning approach, the teacher sets the performance or standard level of success for his class on their

mental ability in general. This approach is designed to make the pupils master the basic minimum learning competencies. Conceptual approach, the purpose of this approach is to make the pupils learn how to get and identify facts and information. From these, they will identify the concepts and sub concepts. Under each concept and sub-concept, sub generalization will be formulated.

Emergence of Social Studies in Namibia

Before independence was achieved in 1990, the colonial government imposed a segregated dual education system. The curriculum was largely designed to serve colonial interests. In this system, history and geography were implemented as two separate subjects and their content was outward oriented. The emphasis was mainly on reading, writing, arithmetic, religious instruction, and basic geography, often neglecting local content, especially under the blanket of Bantu education. After self-determination, the democratic Namibian government implemented significant reforms to forge national unity and cohesion. In the new dispensation, history and geography are integrated from Grade 4 to 7 as one subject that is inward oriented, called Social Studies. The government embraced a Social Studies curriculum that provided learners with an understanding of their society, governance, and environment while fostering civic duties. Social Studies became an integral part of the primary phase while Social Science became part of secondary phase curriculum. In recent years, Social Studies have been subjected to reviews with major revisions in 2013 and 2021 to meet Namibia Vision 2030 goals. The subjects aimed to foster analytical thinking, problem-solving skills, and appreciation of diversity. The government is implementing a competency-based curriculum (CBC) to adapt to the needs of a changing society. There is an increasing emphasis on technology and global issues within the Social Studies curriculum.

Upper Primary Social Studies

The Upper Primary (often referred to as Senior Primary) Social Studies syllabus for Grade 4 through to 7 builds from environmental learning in pre-primary and Religious and Moral education and Environmental Studies in Junior primary. Consistent with the expanding horizon curriculum structure, it uses broad thematic modules presented in sequential and gradual built-up in-depth content coverage. Like the foundation programme, it claims to integrate and infuse emerging issues such as Environmental Education, Population and Family Life Education and HIV/AIDS. It is an integrated subject focusing on Namibian history, geography, environmental issues, and civic responsibility to promote national identity and social cohesion. Developed by the National Institute for Educational Development (NIED), the curriculum uses learner-centered, inquiry-based approaches. It encourages active learning through group work, presentations, debates, and research rather than traditional lectures. The curriculum of Social Studies is meant for teaching and learning at the senior primary school. The design of a Social Studies curriculum for upper primary school aims to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of their society, history, culture, and the world. A well-structured curriculum not only conveys content knowledge but also fosters critical

thinking, civic responsibility, and social awareness. The curriculum can prepare students to navigate the complexities of their societies and contribute positively as informed citizens. Reflects the realities of modern Namibia and equips learners with skills they need to become responsible citizens that cherish a sense of belonging to their community, country, continent and the world.

Two Year Junior Secondary Social Science

The two-year Junior Secondary Grade 8 through to 9 Social Science programme builds on the foundation provided by Lower Primary School environmental studies and Upper Primary Social Studies programmes. Social Science subject in History and Geography offered compulsories for all learners as per curriculum prerequisite. Each of these subjects is taken and treated as a separate entity. In terms of content, geography is taught separately from history subject. The focus of Geography lies on the outlining of Namibian and African Geography, the Earth – Sun relationship and the seasons, the geographic grid of longitudes and latitudes, map interpretation, population, the development of society and its impact on the environment. While history focus on selected episodes of human actions in the past, particularly the written record of the human race, but more generally including scientific and archaeological discoveries about the past. The Social Science syllabus lists cross curricula issues like Environmental Education, Information, Communication and Technology, HIV and AIDS, globalization and national issues such as road safety and climate change. Interestingly, the preamble of the syllabus observes that “there is a limit to the degree to which a syllabus document can infuse emerging issues, it is therefore imperative that the current and future issues should be infused at classroom level. The Structure of the Namibia’s Two- Year Junior Secondary Social Science Syllabus is also based on the expanding horizon curriculum approach.

Senior Secondary Social Science

The Senior Secondary Social Science curriculum builds on the Ten-Year Basic Education programme and is structured under NIED to include History, Geography, and Development Studies, preparing learners for academic and vocational paths. The subjects are elective and prepare learners for further studies in History, Geography, and Development at the tertiary level. The curriculum is organized into broad syllabus areas called subjects. The content is further presented in the form of general and specific objectives. The Senior Secondary Programme makes explicit reference to cross curricular issues. For example, In the preamble of the senior secondary History, learners should build in cultural pride, tolerance and pragmatic attitudes towards critical issues such as gender, HIV/AIDS, globalization and the total commitment to the nation’s development. Secondly, at the end of the two-year programme learners should have acquired knowledge, attitudes and practices that will enhance them to appreciate and respect equality of humankind irrespective of colour, race, ethnic group, gender, class or creed. Thirdly, learners should have acquired an understanding of emerging issues such as HIV/AIDS, global warming, globalization and gender relations.

The curriculum emphasizes Understanding social worlds, economic systems, and historical contexts to develop responsible citizenship. Schools incorporate social sciences in their curricula, focusing on academic excellence.

Social Science at Tertiary level

Tertiary Social Studies in Namibia is primarily offered as the Social Sciences, Humanities, and Education disciplines. As part of the government's policy on training teachers to teach Social Studies at the basic level, Social Studies was introduced at the teacher training colleges in Namibia as far back as the 1990s and the teachers were trained to teach from Grade 4 to 10. The teacher training colleges were liquidated and merged with University of Namibia (UNAM). The graduates of Social Studies at UNAM are restricted to teaching from Grade 4 to 7. It is also offered as a professional degree (B.Ed/B.A.Ed) at other emerging Colleges and Universities in Namibia.

Discussion

The article has found that like most African countries, Social Studies was generally adopted in Namibia's school curriculum on the eve of independence in 1990 by a follow up to the Nairobi process. Government has implemented integrated Social Studies, based on similar structures prevailing in African countries (Quist, 2003). However, what is clear is that the Namibian Social Studies revolve around its society and environment. Furthermore, there is also evidence of over the course of time, Namibian Social Studies underwent changes in objectives and content coverage. It has been established that there is an endless national debate regarding the rationale of Social Studies and how Social Studies can be implemented (Ross, 2006; Brophy, 1990). The case of Namibian is instructive for two reasons, first, Social Studies is acknowledged in preparing the young ones for effective living in the society but enjoy low status in the education system. Second, Social Studies contributes to developing citizens equipped to navigate the complex world (Lilian, 2019). This implies a growing acceptance to address societal issues through Social Studies. In Namibia the culture has been that Social Studies transition from primary, secondary and tertiary level. All these three aspects are connected to issues of curriculum continuity, change and operational experience.

Pedagogically and conceptually, the subject has evolved to enhance learners' knowledge and application. There are numerous additional emerging issues ranging from HIV and AIDS awareness, Environmental Education, Population Education, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), and Road Safety. In a nutshell, the effectiveness of Social Studies in Namibia varies from one classroom to classroom and teachers have different approaches to promoting Social Studies. There are many persistent dilemmas and controversies in Social Studies that will likely never be resolved in Namibia, for example, breadth versus depth of curricular scope, chronology versus issues-based teaching. Nevertheless, Social Studies is a vehicle for nation building in Namibia. Therefore, the ideologies of continuity and change within Social Studies are important to curriculum design, planning, teaching and assessment.

As learners mature intellectually, the Social Studies curriculum should take account of their development, Bennets (2002) notes that continuity and change are widely recognised as desirable qualities within the curriculum as they are elements of curriculum implementation and delivery that are crucial in synchronising policy, teaching, assessment and learning.

Conclusion

The current debate about Social Studies, and its evolution, indicates the need for Social Studies educators to begin a national conversation that can enhance content. If Social Studies is to continue to evolve in Namibia and educators ought to be involved at all levels and allow them to articulate their philosophical difference. Social Studies is full of controversy but harbors possibilities for inquiry and emancipation. Social Studies could be a subject that enables young people to analyze and understand social issues in a holistic way. In practice, however, Social Studies has been and continues to be profoundly conversing in nature, whose primary aim is to fix social order. Social Studies should be strengthened as a catalyst for attainment of an inclusive society in Namibia. The findings of this article go to show that a lot of work needs to be done to shift from teacher-centred to learner-centred pedagogy in practice. Based on the results of the analysis that has been carried out, it can be concluded that the syntax of the inquiry method is not standard and in its implementation the teacher must pay attention to the needs, situations and conditions in Social Studies learning (Jamaludin and Wulandari, 2020). At every phase of the development of Social Studies new challenges arise; in order to overcome these shortcomings, continuous research needs to be carried out in the field of Social Studies. Unfortunately, there is a major limitation in this area as researchers have paid little attention to Social Studies in Namibia. Perhaps this is a big challenge to scholars to pay attention to Namibian Social Studies.

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