



## Improving the Teaching of Social Studies in Primary Schools through Storytelling

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### Abstract

*Social studies is an integrated social science discipline that helps pupils to acquire knowledge, develop right type of values, attitude and problem-solving skills that can make them grow into responsible citizens. It is imperative that primary school pupils are taught with methods that can assist them to create interest in the subject and make their learning permanent. One of such methods is storytelling. This paper examined storytelling as an effective method of teaching social studies in primary schools with much accentuation on discussion of its meaning, importance to teachers and pupils, its effective usage in the classroom among others. Two short stories from primary school contents were included as samples with standard focus (procedure) to follow for effective practice. Based on the discussion, regular usage of storytelling method was recommended for primary school social studies teachers so that pupils can be assisted to develop interest in the subject and for realization of the objectives of social studies.*

**Keywords:** Teaching, Social studies, Storytelling, Primary School, Effective method

### Introduction

Social Studies used to be defined as the study of man; using man as a generic term. Having realised the need for specificity to give social studies a definition that will actually portray what it stands for, the generic 'man' is no longer relevant in this modern age. Social studies is therefore the study of people and how they relate with their various environments. It means the study of problems of human survival in an environment and how to find solutions to them. Ogunyemi (2006)

defined social studies as the study of dynamic interactions people have with themselves and elements of their environments. Ajiboye (2009) described social studies as a school subject that is out to direct and give learners a free hand and opportunity to make enquiries, investigate, discover, discuss, experiment and acquire experiences in order to make decision on social issues and problems and find solutions to them. From their own perspectives, Ajitoni, Salako and Ojebiyi (2013) averred social studies



as the study of people, their activities and relationships as they interact with their physical and socio-cultural environments.

By implication, social studies is all about people human beings that make up the society. To study people therefore requires learning about all aspects (such as economic, political, historical, social, cultural, scientific, physical, religious/spiritual, technological) of human life. Studying people in their various environments means studying them in virtually every context of existence. This, according to Oluwagbohunmi (2012) implies that social studies is concerned with the totality of the realities of peoples' existence. Jekayinfa (2018) observed that it is a complex task to teach about people; and to do this, information must come from many fields of study and this is why Social Studies is an integrated discipline.

Development of critical thinking, problem-solving skills and socially acceptable behaviours in learners remain the fundamental aims of social studies. Oluwagbohunmi (2013) stressed that social studies is not only concerned with acquisition of knowledge but all those problem-solving skills that enable learners think critically about issues and derive conclusions from them. In order to achieve the objectives of social studies, teachers need to acquaint themselves with contemporary methods of teaching it effectively and keep abreast of evolving knowledge

and developments in the society so as to acquire new facts that can help them not to misinform the pupils. It is imperative that pupils are allowed to actively participate in classroom interactions so as to make them develop critical thinking ability and make their learning permanent. It must be noted that pupils develop more interest in a topic when various teaching methods are used.

There are a number of forms of teacher-pupils interaction that can be employed to aid pupils' active participation in the classroom. The particular one selected will depend on the objectives of the lesson, nature of the task at hand, teacher's knowledge of the subject matter/content, teacher's expertise and level of maturation and readiness of the pupils. Some basic principles that make teaching of social studies effective according to Ogundare (2010) include:

- relating the child's learning with the environment;
- developing pupils' interest in learning through participation;
- allowing pupils to learn through direct experience to make concepts real with the aid of pictures, music, films, radio, reading, objects etc.;
- allowing the pupils to tell, write, make, draw and act;
- questioning.

One of the ways of making the teaching of social studies effective is through the use of storytelling.



## Storytelling

Storytelling had been a means of enjoying leisure time in old days. Parents and children usually gather in front of the house at moon time to listen to stories after their daily farming activities. Wikipedia (2020) stated that storytelling predates writing and its earliest forms were orally combined. The purpose of storytelling is to teach moral lesson and expose learners to some events which happened in the past so that they can learn from them. Stories are told in such a way that listeners will be able to utilise the lessons learnt from such stories in real life situations. This makes story telling part of our culture. Wikipedia (2020) submitted that every culture has its own stories or narratives which are shared as a means of entertainment, education, cultural preservation or instilling moral values.

Stories are told orally to be committed to memory and passed from generation to generation. Lugmayr (2017) emphasized that stories are told to entertain, transfer knowledge between generations, maintain cultural heritage or warn others of danger. Vanivim and Williams (2009) believed that community values learned through storytelling help to guide future generations and aid in identity formation. The traditional forms of storytelling according to Wikipedia (2020) used to come through fairytales, folklores, mythology, legends, fables etc. It further stated that oral traditions of storytelling are found in several civilisations. Oral storytelling came in various forms

including songs, poetry, chants and dance. Some stories evolved according to a particular sequence or plot of events which take place in time and space. Lugmayr, Sutinen, Sohunen, Sedano, Hlavacs, Suero and Montano (2017) described this as narrative flow of events pushing the story forward; hence, a sequence evolves according to a timeline of actions related to people and characters whose life events evolve based on cause and effect relations.

Storytelling method can still be used to teach the young ones. Kochhar (2012) observed that storytelling is one of the important methods of teaching social studies particularly the historical part. She emphasised that stories of great men, women, famous rulers, reformers, writers, saints, discoverers, scientists, stories of scripts, numbers, trade, money – all need to be told to the children in the primary classes.

The National Storytelling Network (n.d) defined storytelling as an art form and a valuable form of human expression. It is the interactive art of using words and actions to reveal the elements and images of a story while encouraging the listeners' imagination. According to Yoast (n.d), storytelling is about telling stories, using stories to engage the audience or make something clear. Storytelling is an art which aims at presenting events to the pupils (through the medium of clear speech, vivid, interesting and ordered sequence) in such a way that their minds are able to reconstruct the happenings and they live in



imagination through the experiences recounted either as spectators or possibly as participants. Teachers can make the lessons lively and interesting through storytelling to the extent that the pupils can visualize the extent and personalities described (Oyinloye, 2017).

### **Importance of Storytelling**

Storytelling as a method of teaching social studies can be useful in many ways. For the teachers, it helps them to:

- \* gain pupils' rapt attention and concentration.
- \* teach facts about life and people's culture
- \* make abstract real
- \* preserve people's culture

For the pupils, storytelling helps them to:

- \* develop interest in the subject and aids their attention
- \* develop positive habits and preserve the culture
- \* assimilate and create new ideas.
- \* remember course material than simple facts
- \* share information in a familiar and accessible form
- \* enjoy the lesson as it adds clarity
- \* develop listening skill and form vivid mental images of the story
- \* develop ability to create and tell stories
- \* create a more personal student-teacher connection (Yoast (n.d) and Green, 2004)

### **Developing Pupils' Interest in Storytelling**

To help pupils develop interest in

social studies through storytelling, Hansen (n.d) suggested that teachers should allow pupils to:

- ~ tell their own stories
- ~ tell stories about their personal experiences
- ~ tell stories about family members who exhibit character traits (positive habits that can be emulated)
- ~ conduct research and share stories about famous personalities in the country

While supporting this, Combs and Beach (1994) added that engaging pupils in storytelling activities about themselves, their families and famous people will:

- develop their interest and communication skills
- develop their understanding of democratic ideals, cultural diversity and participatory citizenship
- motivate pupils to learn about the past and present
- create class bond through shared experiences
- help them recount facts with ease and interpret stories personally
- assist them in knowledge retention because once heard, story has the power to be repeated.

### **Storytelling in Social Studies Classroom**

In social studies, storytelling is done with a purpose that is beyond entertainment. It is used to teach ethics, values, cultural norms and differences. While stressing the importance of storytelling in social studies for



primary classroom, Rossiter (2002) submitted that stories are effective educational tools that allow listeners to become engaged. It can be seen as a foundation for learning and teaching. Sim (2004) also maintained that it is able to survive for so long because it is a powerful medium for transmitting knowledge, culture, traditions, beliefs, morals and values of a community.

Learning is most effective when it takes place in social environments that provide authentic social cues about how knowledge is to be applied. Stories function as a tool to pass on knowledge in a social context (Wikipedia, 2020). Iseke (2013) emphasized that storytelling has been studied as a way to investigate and archive cultural knowledge and values within American communities.

### **What to Consider when Telling Stories:**

Effective use of this method demands special attention of the teacher to tell the story:

- in simple words that the pupils can easily understand.
- in an orderly manner i.e. beginning middle ending.
- with actions using hands, body gestures, facial expressions to demonstrate.
- stressing common elements, characters, vocabularies for pupils to take note of them.
- using catchy words, phrases and illustrations to create proper images (Kochhar (2012), Oyinloye (2017).

### **The K-W-L Strategy**

K-W-L strategy as defined by Oyinloye (2017 ) is a teaching model that can also be used by the teacher to encourage learners to engage in activities that will activate their prior knowledge and assist them to link the new information with what they are about to learn. This model can be interpreted as follows:

K – what the pupils know

W – what the pupils want to find out

L – what the pupils learn and still need to learn.

This implies that teachers' stories must be based on:

What the pupils know    what they want to find out    what they want to learn

### **Steps in Using Stories in the Classroom**

The following steps can be followed by the teacher:

- Use stories to supplement textbook
- Link the story with objectives and content of the lesson.
- Memorise and internalize the story
- Tell the story without looking at the textbook
- Have eye contact with the pupils all the time
- Use voice, facial expressions, gestures, body language and demonstrations
- Select target words, new ideas to be learnt.
- Stress the words and new ideas that require pupils' attention.
- Allow learners to retell the story carefully using their own words.
- Listen to the story teller and be part of the audience.





- Assist the pupils by reminding them of the target words to emphasize.
- Allow the pupils to bring out new ideas learnt from the story and relate with content of the lesson.

### Procedure for Storytelling in Social Studies

#### Standard Focus 1 – Tell the Story (Teacher)

Examine the following two short stories as examples selected from primary school contents:

#### Story 1

There are three boys that are very close friends. They attend Federal government science secondary school, Ilesa. Their names are Tolu, Chike and Mamud. The boys are in the same class and they always sit together. The name of their teacher is Mr Nino. When they get to school every morning, they just greet by saying “good morning” to friends and the teacher. One day, Mr Nino teaches the class 'culture of greeting'. He explains to the pupils that there are many ways of greeting according to people's culture. He also says that children should learn to greet their parents in the way of their culture. Each of the pupils knows their culture but they do not know the culture of other people.

On the visiting day, their parents are in the school to see them, Chike and Mamud are surprised to see Tolu prostrating to greet his parents. When Chike is shaking his father's hand to

greet him, Tolu and Mamud are surprised too. Mamud and his father stoop to shake hands to greet each other. That is how the three friends learn greeting in two other different cultures.

#### Story 2

Ngozi lives with her parents in the village. As a young girl at home, she usually goes to the farm to fetch firewood for cooking. She will arrange the firewood in the fire place made with three big stones and light with matches anytime she wants to prepare food. When the food is on fire, she will sit close to it and fan it so that the fire will not go down. As she does this, she is disturbed by smoke and she tries to keep her face away from the smoke of the fire. At the end of the cooking, she finds that the back of the pot has become dark.

One day, her mother buys kerosene stove and brings it home. Ngozi is very happy because she will no longer go to the farm to fetch firewood, she will not have to run away from smoke or waste time washing back of the pots. But she has to buy kerosene, clean the stove regularly and still wash back of pots blackened by soot from the stove.

Ngozi's happiest day is the day her brother from Lagos brings gas cooker to them in the village. When she starts using gas cooker, she finds that it is very easy to light. There is no smoke from the fire, the pot remains clean and food cooks faster. Ngozi cannot hide her feelings and she says “Oh! What a better and easier way to cook”.



### **Standard Focus 2 – Retell the Story (Pupils)**

Retelling is a method whereby the pupils recall what they have heard after the story is over and tell it as can be remembered orally or in a written form. Retelling shows how much pupils have assimilated and how well they can reconstruct the information. It reflects pupil's level of comprehension and ability to give a personal interpretation of the story.

After telling the story, a pupil should be asked to retell the story. Retelling of story should be done in sequential order. At the end of each retelling, pupils should be encouraged to create their own stories if possible from previous topics (Jegede, Onukaogu and Arua, 2003).

### **Standard Focus 3 – Ask Questions on the Story (Teacher)**

In the absence of adequate time for retelling, the following steps can be taken to ask general questions on the story to determine their level of assimilation:

1. Introduction: Once upon a time, there was/is a ....
2. Theme/Content: What was/is the story about?
3. Setting: Where and when the story happened?
4. Characters: The people(s) involved in the story
5. Conflict: Did they have any problem? Mention them.
6. Resolution: How was the problem solved?

7. Conclusion: How did the story end?

### **Standard Focus 4 – Developing Critical Thinking Skill in Pupils**

There are many ways to help pupils develop critical thinking through storytelling:

- a) Allow the pupils to give the story a title. It will be a surprise that the pupils will come up with many different titles out of which an appropriate one can be selected by the teacher.
- b) Let them mention the moral lessons and/or new ideas learnt from the story
- c) Pupils can also be allowed to dramatize the story by assigning roles to them to play. This will enable them to think of the role to play, the words to say and the character to display.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This paper has examined storytelling as an effective and appropriate method of teaching social studies in primary schools. Guidelines to be followed for productive usage were highlighted. In view of the discussion, regular usage of storytelling method was recommended for primary school social studies teachers so that pupils can be assisted to develop interest in the subject and for realization of the objectives of social studies.



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