NAVIGATING THE PATHWAY OF GLOBAL CONCERNS: THE NEED FOR SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION INTERVENTION

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Abstract
In the context of a more just and equitable society, the critical role of the goals of Social Studies education is paramount in navigating the pathway of global concerns. This position paper examines the role of Social Studies in addressing ***poverty and inequality concern*** *in addition to* ***political instability and conflicts.*** *In the context of political instability and conflict, Social Studies education plays an even more important role in shaping informed and responsible citizens, fostering an understanding of civic responsibilities, and promoting democratic values. Finally, the importance of Social Studies in tackling poverty and inequality issues is critical in developing a socially conscious and active citizenry. Social Studies offers the groundwork for individuals who are not only aware of societal concerns but also motivated to working towards a more equitable and just world by offering a comprehensive grasp of the core causes, encouraging empathy, and inspiring civic engagement. The incorporation of these concepts into Social Studies curricula is a critical step in the development of the next generation of activists. Social Studies education lays the framework for understanding, tolerance, and proactive problem-solving in the face of political issues by producing informed, critical, and engaged citizens.*

Keywords: Conflicts, Global concerns, Political instability, Poverty and inequality, Social Studies Education

Introduction

Navigating the pathway of global concerns is a complex and multifaceted challenge. Nations across the globe is confronted with a plethora of serious concerns that affect individuals, communities, and governments on a worldwide scale. This is specifically true of the current Israeli-Hamas-Palestine situation. Presently, nations around world faces different interconnected and complex global concerns that extends from political, economic, environmental, to social domains. These global concerns cuts across national borders, impacting people and nations on a scale previously unseen in human history. It cuts across the debate on climate change and pandemics to poverty and inequality, addressing these issues requires coordinated efforts at local, national, and international levels.

Currently, global concerns cuts across different paths of challenges that requires the attention of all stakeholders – nations, non-profit organizations, specialized organizations, educational institutions and communities – to ensure a lasting solution to major global concerns affecting humanity. It requires the above stakeholders to handle global concerns ranging from Handling climate change, cultural diversity/identity, and global governance and international organizations, global health, digital transformation, migration, inequality, migration and displacement, political instability and conflicts and poverty and inequality amongst many emerging concerns ravaging the world. This study focuses on two major global concerns in the form of poverty and inequality and political instability and conflicts.

Since it is acknowledged as the greatest risk "jeopardisinga a balanced society's socio-economic development", eliminating poverty has been the primary objective (Balvociute, 2020) of many governmental and non-

governmental bodies for many years. Poverty is a recurring problem that has a negative impact on people's lives and is a crucial component of unsustainable socioeconomic development (Bossert, Cato & Kamaga, 2022). Thus, the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda now includes addressing climate change in addition to addressing extreme poverty and fighting injustices and inequalities. Significant worldwide challenges include the complex nature of poverty and the enduring disparities both within and between nations (Alvaredo, Chancel, Piketty, Saez & Zucman, 2017; Kwadzo, 2015).

Furthermore, there is no denying that political unrest and violence have had a variety of effects on people throughout history. There has never been a year, for the past two decades, without experiencing one form of conflict within and between nations. This calls for global concern looking at the magnitude of displacement, hunger, death, infrastructural destruction, environmental depletion, amongst many other challenges. In order to effectively navigate the pathway of global concerns; it is important to have knowledge on the breadth and depth of the challenges at hand and how Social Studies Education can be used as an instrument of intervention for global challenges.

Addressing Poverty and Inequality: The Role of Social Studies

Economic disparities persist on a global scale, with billions of people living in poverty or facing extreme inequality (World Bank, 2021). Tackling poverty and inequality requires comprehensive efforts, including social safety nets, access to education, and policies that promote equitable economic growth. Poverty and inequality are fundamental global issues that affect individuals, communities, and entire nations. Poverty and inequality are interlinked issues, with each reinforcing the other. Inequality exacerbates poverty by limiting access to opportunities and resources for marginalized populations. Poverty, in turn, contributes to inequality by creating conditions in which wealth is concentrated among the few. These constraints are not restricted to specific regions or countries but are prevalent worldwide.

Poverty is a condition that denies people access to basic necessities and opportunities, while inequality is the unequal distribution of resources, wealth, and opportunities among different groups within a society. Poverty is described as a "pronounced deprivation in well-being" by the World Bank (Haughton & Khandker, 2009). Depending on how one defines well-being, the term may be strict or loose. Narrow definitions frequently concentrate on commodities, evaluating if people or households have enough money to meet their requirements. In these situations, the majority of the time, poverty is understood in terms of money, specifically household income or consumption (Haughton & Khandker, 2009).

Poverty is a condition that denies people access to basic necessities and opportunities, while inequality refers to the unequal distribution of resources, wealth, and opportunities among different groups within a society. Inequality is a pervasive global concern that transcends geographical, cultural, and socio-economic boundaries. It encompasses disparities in income, wealth, access to resources, opportunities, and well-being among individuals and communities. Despite significant progress in various aspects of human development, inequality remains a persistent challenge that affects both developed and developing nations.

Poverty and inequality takes various forms the most important being economic disparities and inequality. Economic disparities, such as unequal income distribution and wealth concentration, are primary drivers of both poverty and inequality. With differences in wealth and income, it is arguably the most well-known type of inequality. Poverty among the disadvantaged population rises when few elites control a sizable share of the country's wealth. The richest individuals and corporations often amass wealth at rates much higher than the rest of the population.

Disparities in access to healthcare, education, and other basic services are among the factors contributing to poverty and inequality, along with social and educational disparity. It covers things like unequal access to healthcare, unequal educational chances, and

discrimination on the basis of gender, race, and religion, among other things. Income inequality is exacerbated by limited access to high-quality education. The cycle of poverty is sustained by those with lesser levels of education since they typically have lower earning capacity. Poorer health outcomes for marginalised communities might result from inadequate access to healthcare and health services, which can further restrict their economic chances and prolong poverty.

Political inequality is a factor contributing to poverty and inequality as a worldwide issue. This speaks to disparities in the influence and power of politics. The voices of marginalised communities may be silenced when a small elite group or interest holds disproportionate political power. Discrimination based on race, gender, ethnicity, or other characteristics is another aspect that can result in marginalised groups being less able to access resources and opportunities.

The consequence of the above is that hinders national and economic growth. The lack of access to resources and opportunities, social and educational inequalities amongst others prevents people from contributing to their full potential, hampering economic development. High levels of inequality and widespread poverty can lead to social unrest and conflicts. This has been linked to increased crime rates, social tension, and even violent uprisings. Because of the lack of access to clean water, nutritious food, and healthcare, poverty is linked to poor health outcomes. Poverty is frequently sustained by health inequities. The educational disadvantages that impoverished children frequently experience result in poorer educational attainment and fewer prospects for upward mobility. It is possible for poverty and inequality to be handed down through the generations. Poverty is more likely to follow a child into adulthood if they are born into it.

Before delving into the role played by social studies education, it is crucial to understand the magnitude and scope of global poverty and inequality. Merely speaking, Poverty is not an issue of income; it encompasses deprivation in areas such as education, healthcare, sanitation, and human rights. Contrarily, inequality describes the unequal distribution of wealth, opportunity, and resources among people and communities. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 1 (No Poverty) and Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities), underscore the global commitment to addressing these issues.

Roughly sixty percent of the world's extreme poor in 2023 lived in Sub-Saharan Africa alone, while 81% of the global poor at the poverty line of $3.65 lived in Sub-Saharan Africa or South Asia. According to World Bank estimates, almost one billion people were lifted out of severe poverty between 1990 and 2015, while 700 million people were estimated to be living in extreme poverty in 2015 under the revised worldwide poverty standard of USD 1.90 per day (World Bank, 2023).

Global income inequality index (GNI) declined between 2000 and 2015, with the global GINI decreasing from 75 per cent to 62 per cent (World Bank, 2016). Levels of income inequality have fallen in some countries, especially in Latin America, while in others they have risen, especially in high-income countries (World Bank, 2023). Almost half of the global wealth is currently held by just 1% of the population, indicating a rise in wealth inequality globally (Hardoon, 2015). Large disparities in nutrition, education, and health nevertheless exist within and between social categories as well as between various areas within countries, despite efforts to reduce income and health inequalities (UNDP, 2015).

Poverty and inequality, no doubt, are among the most formidable challenges facing the world today. These issues transcend geographical boundaries, affect diverse populations, and have far-reaching consequences for both developed and developing nations. While the causes and manifestations of poverty and inequality are multifaceted, education has emerged as a powerful tool for addressing these global concerns. In particular, social studies education plays a pivotal role in raising awareness, promoting understanding, and fostering solutions to these complex issues.

Social Studies education encompasses a multidisciplinary approach that combines history, geography, civics, economics, and

sociology. It equips students with knowledge and skills to understand the complexities of the social, political, and economic structures that underlie poverty and inequality. Social studies education can be used by educational institutions to contribute to addressing this global concern by fostering awareness and understanding of poverty and inequalities through the Social Studies Education curriculum.

The curriculum provides students with a comprehensive understanding of the historical, cultural, and economic factors that leads to poverty and inequality. It encourages critical thinking and analysis of complex social issues, allowing students to recognize the root causes of these challenges and how to limit them. Social Studies Education promotes critical thinking, enabling students to question and challenge prevailing narratives related to poverty and inequality. It equips them with the skills to analyze data, evaluate sources, and identify bias in order to form well-informed opinions. Teaching and learning about the experiences of marginalized communities, individuals and those affected by poverty and inequality fosters some level of empathy and compassion among learners. This emotional connection motivates students to take action and advocate for change. Social Studies Education teaching will emphasize the importance of responsible global citizenship as it teaches students about their role in addressing global concerns and the means they can contribute to creating a just and equitable world free from poverty and inequalities.

The Role of Social Studies Education in Addressing Political Instability and Conflicts

Political instability and conflicts represent significant global challenges that affect nations, regions, and the world as a whole. These issues manifest in various forms, including civil wars, ethnic and religious tensions, authoritarianism, and territorial disputes, leading to humanitarian crises, displacement of populations, and economic disruptions. Political instability and conflicts have far-reaching consequences, and addressing them is crucial for the promotion of peace, security, and sustainable development on a global scale.

A struggle over values or claims to status, power, and limited resources is referred to be a conflict. In these situations, the goals of the opposing parties are not just to achieve the desired values but also to neutralise, harm, or destroy their rivals. These disputes can arise between people and groups, or between groups and individuals (Akresh, Lucchetti, and Thirumurthy, 2012). According to Akresh, Lucchetti, and Thirumurthy (2012), violent conflict is unavoidable and appears in many societies. Both small-scale and localised conflicts as well as large-scale ones are possible. The earlier kind of combat is characterised by a brief duration and is fought with light and small armaments, including cutlasses, machine guns, rifles, self-loading pistols, bows and arrows, and knives (UNICEF, 2021). Large-scale wars, however, can happen on a national, regional, or even global scale. Large-scale conflicts in Nigeria include the insurgency of Boko Haram, banditry, militants from Niger-Delta, and other regional agitations. Armed wars can arise for a variety of reasons, including political and religious ones.

A range of causes have contributed to the rise of conflicts that have resulted in widespread violence and severe loss of life and property, especially since the early 1980s in numerous countries. These include conflicts over geographical boundaries, resource control struggles, political difficulties, economic inequality, and ethno-religious disagreements. These disputes usually stem from a variety of issues, even though they are commonly presented in terms of political beliefs, prejudice, religion, ethnicity, poverty, and inequality. However, the author argues that the coexistence of political, religious, and economic crises is the fundamental cause of political instability and conflicts (Rhene & Sirleaf, 2022).

A number of factors contribute to political instability and conflict, such as poor or dishonest leadership, a lack of transparency, and the deterioration of democratic values. Citizens' dissatisfaction with their governments often fuels protests and uprisings. Differences in ethnicity, religion, and cultural identity can lead to tensions and conflict when they are exploited

by political actors for personal gain. These divisions can result in discrimination, violence, and even genocide. Conflicts over land borders, maritime boundaries, and sovereignty claims are a common source of international tensions and conflict, often with global implications. This is the basic podium for most of the recurring predicaments of political instability and conflict as a global concern which needs to be addressed.

For instance, the Syrian Civil War, which began in 2011, has led to one of the most significant humanitarian crises of the 21st century. It resulted from a complex web of factors, including authoritarianism, economic instability, and ethno-religious tensions. The conflict has caused mass displacement, destruction, and international security concerns. South Sudan's secession from Sudan in 2011 and its subsequent internal conflicts have resulted in political instability and a humanitarian crisis. Ethnic divisions, resource scarcity, and weak governance have contributed to the turmoil.

Throughout the course of human history, wars and political instability and armed conflict has affected people in different ways, albeit children and women have suffered disproportionately during conflicts. Around the globe, there are intense tensions within countries and between countries. Early this year it was between Russia and Ukraine and the currently it is between Israel and Hamas (Palestine) all having political and religious undertone especially with the later. The security situation in Nigeria has become increasingly complex and uncertain. Various non-state armed groups have emerged and consolidated coercive power to terrorise the Nigerian population in recent years, as evidenced by the activities of armed bandits, criminal gangs, separatist groups, Islamic fundamentalists, kidnappers, and many others referred to in the Nigerian media as "unknown gunmen."

Political instability and armed conflicts persist in various regions, leading to humanitarian crises and instability. A case on ground is the current impasse between Israel and Palestine. Conflict resolution and peacekeeping efforts, often facilitated by international organizations like the United Nations, have been vital in addressing these concerns (UN, 2021), but looking at the efforts of the United Nations and other regional organizations to solve or minimize the occurrence of political instability and conflict the situation persists with no hope of its seizure among and within nations. What hope remains, therefore, for humanity with its numerous unending efforts? It is the belief of the writer that one crucial tool for addressing political instability and conflicts, both as national and global concern, is social studies education.

Given the foregoing, and in order to free Nigeria from the shackles of insecurity and terrorism, it is critical to build a culture of peace through education in order to cultivate and promote qualitative values and attitudes of peaceful coexistence among residents. As mentioned by FRN (2014), the philosophy of Nigerian education specifies that education shall be used as a vehicle for achieving social, economic, and political development in any society. According to FRN (2014), education is also an instrument for national development; to that end, the creation of ideas, their integration for national development, and the interaction of people and ideas are all parts of education. Previously, section 1 (2a) said that Nigeria's overall idea is to live in unity and harmony as one indivisible, indissoluble, democratic, and sovereign nation established on the tenets of freedom, equality, and justice (FRN, 2014).

This concept emphasises the importance of peaceful cohabitation among all Nigerians, regardless of tribe, religion, culture, or linguistic variation. Within the current globalisation content, where cross-border violence and conflict has become a prominent factor influencing national politics and domestic as well as foreign policy goals of nations, the quest for global peace and security has occupied the attention of governments and non-governmental organisations worldwide. One of the goals of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) is to promote international cooperation through education, science, and culture, as well as to recognise the role and contributions of that organisation in the education of young people in the spirit of international understanding, cooperation, and

peace (Enu, 2016).

Social Studies educators bear a great deal of responsibility for ensuring that education is used to achieve world peace by "strengthening respect for human rights and fundamental freedom... promoting understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups" (Enu, 2016). As a result, social studies educators are viewed as agents of social change who coordinate social groups through educational strategies that assist citizens in understanding and participating in their social, political, economic, and cultural surroundings in order to achieve full integration into society (Enu, 2016).

Social Studies Education is the component of a school's general education plan focused with preparing citizens to participate in a democratic society. In a democracy, the most important goal of social studies education is to assist students acquire a store of tested social theory, or a body of ideas relevant to present social challenges and views (Odia, 2014).

According to Danesh as cited in Odia (2014), the universal presence of political instability and conflict which has become a global concern has always necessitated that priority be given to education for conflict management, and for communal preservation. Social Studies Education can act as a catalyst of peace, both nationally and globally. Social Studies Education in playing a significant role in addressing the global concerns related to political instability and conflict should aim to teach about world mindedness. World mindedness, as noted in Mhlauli (2014), is about teaching of knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to live effectively in a world possessing limited natural resources and characterized by ethnic diversity, political ideologies, cultural pluralism, and increasing interdependence. It involves learning about problems and issues which cut across national boundaries and the interconnectedness of systems which may be cultural, ecological, economic, religion, political and technological.

In a bid to playing a major role in addressing global concern related to political instability and conflict, Odia (2014) outlined that Social Studies Education can incorporate and teach themes on world issues such as: (1) Socio-political issues (poverty, conflicts/war tribalism);(2) Environmental issues and natural disasters; (3) Economic issues (trade, economic recession (4) Social issues (communication and information technology); and (5) Political issues (international relations, celebration of international days such as World AIDS Day, World Peace Day, Commonwealth Day etc). Emphasis should be placed on the importance of these world issues because they affect global peace.

Using Social Studies as an instrument to achieve global peace and security, it demands some level of moral education with the following objectives as identified by (Chiba 2004):

(i) developing in students a sense of respect for human worth;

(ii) developing in students a rich mind and a sense of humanity;

(iii)Producing citizens who develop democratic society and nation and

(iv)grooming students who are capable of contributing to the realization of a peaceful international community.

Conclusion

Social Studies Education is critical in solving global issues such as poverty, inequality, political instability, and violence. It provides students with the knowledge, critical thinking skills, and civic engagement necessary to comprehend the complexities of these challenges, evaluate multiple perspectives, and contribute to just solutions through informed democratic involvement. Furthermore, social studies education raises awareness of global issues related to peace and stability by exposing students to historical and contemporary examples of political instability and conflict, developing critical thinking skills to analyse various points of view, and encouraging active participation in resolving these global concerns as informed and engaged citizens.

Suggestions

In line with the broad issues addressed in this paper, it was suggested that the Social Studies

Education curriculum should be used as an instrument of great change in social attitude and empathy towards eradication of poverty and inequality in addition to the fight for political stability and a conflict free society and that there is the necessity for constant Social Studies education curriculum review to enable it inculcate new global challenges if Social Studies is viewed to hold an instrument of change in for our modern world. Finally, from all indication, the means to diminish the risks associated with poverty and inequality is through education and job creation. The implication of this is that governments should provide the necessary conditions and environment to ensure education for all and as well as job creation.

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