

FOSTERING BLENDED FIELD TRIPS FOR EFFECTIVE TEACHING OF SOCIAL STUDIES IN AND AFTER COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS

By

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ABSTRACT

Globally, pedagogical benefits of field trips on students learning outcomes across different domains and subject areas have long being recognized. Particularly, field trips are viable tools for accessing community resources for effective Social Studies instructions. Field trips tradition that Social Studies is known for is being challenged by many social dynamics. Significantly, the recent outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic created multiple challenges for education sector. Field trips in Social Studies cannot be relegated, or eradicated in view of its many benefits to students learning outcomes. The paper concludes that Social Studies teaching should tilt towards social constructivism approach. It recommends that pedagogical paradigm shift in and after COVID-19 pandemic is imperative. Importantly, Social Studies teachers and students technology capacity building is germane to the wider and sustainable adoption of plentitudes of global best practices in teaching and learning.

Keywords: Blended field trip, Coronavirus, Field trip, Social Studies, Virtual field trip, Learning Outcomes

INTRODUCTION

Globally, field trips are recognized as essential and integral parts of the curriculum, and effective teaching and learning process. However, observation revealed that in the contemporary Nigerian educational system, many schools systems have limited the number, or even excluded field trips altogether from their educational plans and activities. The fact remains that, if well planned, coordinated, and executed, field trips can have deep and lasting educational values in the lives of the students. According to Behrendt and Franklin (2014), field trips are designed and embarked upon to accomplish some specific educational purposes. These include: to provide personal experiences to students, to promote students interest and motivation in different subject areas, to create inter-relationships, and to enhance social interaction.

Field trips can have profound effects on students' learning, attitudes, beliefs and perceptions, regardless of gender, ethnic and religious backgrounds. Studies have established that field trips positively influenced the interests and attitudes of students across many subject areas. Students develop their cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of learning when they move from the classrooms to the outdoor and real-life environment (Patric, 2010; Gormez, 2014; Knutson, 2016; Myer, 2018). Nabors, Edward and Murray (2009) assert that field trips help to sharpen students' skills of observation and perceptions because it appeals to all the senses.

Field trips are viable tools for accessing community resources for the effective Social Studies instructions. Field trips provide unlimited potentials for active learning in Social Studies. Social Studies is the study of man in his physical and social environment. This implies that Social Studies is the holistic study of man. Consequent upon this, therefore, outside the classroom is a world of rich learning opportunities for Social Studies students (Maxim, 2003).

Social Studies education is culture-oriented. This means that culture is central to the teaching and learning of Social Studies. Social Studies is defined as citizenship education, education for cultural integration and education for living. Thus, Social Studies is defined as the integrated study of social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence and help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions as citizens of a culturally diverse and democratic society in an interdependent world (NCSS, 1992). Edinyang and Mezieobi (2013) affirm that one of the specific aims of Social Studies is to identify and appreciate the cultural similarities and differences of people in Nigeria to foster unity in diversity. Garba (2013) reiterates that right from the introduction of Social Studies into Nigerian schools, its potentials at promoting the beliefs, values, and ethics of inter-cultural understanding and tolerance have never been in doubt. From the foregoing, it is pertinent to ascertain that field trips provide great access for students to learn, adapt to, and tolerate diverse cultures as citizens of the global community.

It is worthy of note that the field trips tradition that Social Studies education is known for is also being challenged by many social dynamics, these include: cost of organizing field trips and parental poverty (Gray, 2012), liability risks associated with taking students off school sites (Greenhalgh, 2012), securing the consent of parents (Michie, 1998), to mention few. Field trips in Social Studies cannot just be relegated, or eradicated in view of its many benefits. Therefore, Social Studies teachers with technological know-how, now incorporates virtual field trips.

The recent outbreak of corona virus (COVID-19) pandemic created multiple challenges for education sector. The disruptions caused by Covid-19 in the educational sector may last longer than expected if a more reliable and globally accepted vaccine or solution is not found on time and the spread of the disease continues (UNESCO, 2020). The unprecedented closure of schools worldwide because of COVID-19 pandemic, revalidate the urgent need for adoption of and deployment of cutting edge technologies in education. Thus, as the world struggles to contain COVID-19, or any future outbreaks, the use of educational technological platforms would become the “new normal”, or “new realities” for educational institutions, educators, and learners globally. The fact remains that technology is integral to students-teacher connection and communication especially in moment of isolations, quarantines, social distancing and lockdowns resulting from COVID-19 pandemic and other future emergencies.

Against this background, therefore, this paper proposes blended field trips as innovative revision to the long standing tradition of physical or real (real sites visit) field trips in Social Studies.

Conceptual Clarification

Concept of Social Studies

Social Studies has no universally accepted definitions. Social Studies definitions vary according to the authors as well as the philosophy and aspirations of every country. Social Studies is an integrated study of issues derived from the humanities, social sciences and other areas of studies in order to have an holistic understanding of the problems and to proffer solutions to them so that the human can live peaceably with the existing and emerging circumstances in the surrounding physical and social environment (Ojedokun, 2020). According to Yakubu (2018), Social Studies is a problem-approached subject. It promotes the development of positive societal values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge that are capable of enhancing national integration and development.

Adagonye (2015) defines Social Studies as the integration of knowledge, attitudes, values, and beliefs for the purpose of citizenship education towards effective participation in societal reconstructions. Abeshi (2015) opines that Social Studies is a programme of study which a society uses to instill in students the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and actions it considers important concerning the relationships human beings have with one another, their world and themselves. Ajitoni (2017) asserts that Social Studies is concerned with three human relationships: human to own self, human to other humans, and human to the environment. These relationships, however, lead to the ultimate development of desirable socio-civic and personal behaviours.

Edinyang and Mezieobi (2013) define Social Studies as an integrated field of study that probes man’s environmental relationships and imbues man with high level of intellectual and social skills as well as competencies which are germane to solving man’s diverse environmental challenges for better and effective living. Adebisi (2020) reiterates that Social Studies is a culture – oriented discipline that collaborate with basic social institutions such as marriage, family, and religion to develop core-societal values in individuals for the purpose of enhancing orderliness, peaceful co-existence and rapid development.

Field Trips

A field trip, which may also be termed as an instructional trip, school excursion, or school journey is a curriculum approved trip with an educational intent. Tal and Morag (2009)

describe field trips as students experiences outside the classrooms at interactive locations designed for educational purposes. Asmani (2010) defines field trip as a form of teaching carried out in specific but relevant locations outside the school to learn or investigate certain issues or phenomena. He states further that field trips may serve as an introduction to a new concept, or provide experiences that reinforce ideas or topics introduced in the classrooms.

Fuller (2012) views field trip as an opportunity to do something new and different in a new environment, breaking away from the humdrum of the school routines. Thus, according to him reinvigorate students and breathe life into the lesson plans. According to Heath (2012), field trips train learners on how to go about their social responsibilities and heightened learners' interest in the career of their choice. For Oloyede, Ajibade and Bamidele (2006), field trip is the act of taking students out of the classroom into the community for the purpose of learning.

Field trips play key role in generating interest in Social Studies students. The very mention of a field trip often makes the most reticent students excited. Field trips have long being recognized as important part of Social Studies education. With proper implementation, field trips enable students to interact and make effective connections to their prior knowledge in the class, the reading and what they experience on the field.

Virtual Field Trips (VFTs)

Virtual field trips are technology based experiences that allow students to take an educational journey without leaving the classroom (Cox and Su, 2004). Virtual field trips are guided and narrated electronic tours that have been selected by educators and arranged in a thread of programmes that students can follow from site to site with just the click of a single button.

A virtual field trip recreates a wide range of aspects and complexities of the real world in digital format using both audio and visual components. It allows students to digitally immerse themselves and collaborate in diverse physical and socio-cultural environment with the aim of acquiring knowledge and experiences similar to those set during real field trips. Taking students on a virtual field trip is a great way to spark their interest and motivate their learning in a specific content area.

Blended Field Trips (BFTs)

It is an integrated approach that combines real or physical field trips (real site visit) with virtual field trips in a manner that supports a social constructivism mode of learning. Blended field trips have two components. These include: the traditional, real, or physical field trips (real site visit) and the virtual field trips (technology-based, documentary field trips). Oyler (2014) found out that both virtual field trips and real field trips are effective strategies for enhancing students learning outcomes in Social Studies.

The Added Values of Virtual Field Trips

It is easy to imagine the flexibility and logistical powers of going on a field trip without leaving the school and the classroom environment. Virtual field trips do not equate with the traditional (real) field trips. But when combined with the real field trips or used as a replacement for a lesson, or lecture, students gain a greater depth of knowledge (Robinson, 2009).

Virtual field trips can be repeated over and over again by the students. The mode of application provides opportunity for the students to watch the virtual field trips documentary

over and over again, as well as at their own pace. Thus, ensure better understanding, comprehension, and learning.

Virtual field trips increase students' enjoyment of the learning process, as well as increase the understanding of the issues being discussed (Wlodkowski, 2011).

Virtual field trips are valuable, carbon sensitive way of learning about unfamiliar environment and climate change. The Green House Gases (GHG) emissions – related benefits of virtual field trips is highly commendable. Virtual field trips innovative approach is being promoted in order to enhance both sustainable tourism agenda, as well as in addressing the extensive and serious challenges of climate change (Bramwell and Lane, 2012).

Conclusion

One major conclusion emerges from this paper. The issue is not virtual field trips replacing the traditional (real or physical) field trips or not. Basically Social Studies teaching should tilt towards social constructivism. Both real or physical field trips and virtual field trips should provide students with opportunity to make multiple links between what is being taught in the classroom and experiences in the real world outside the classroom.

Recommendations

This paper recommends that:

- Pedagogical paradigm shift in and after COVID-19 pandemic is imperative.
- Social Studies teachers and students technology capacity building is germane to the wider and sustainable adoption of plentitudes of global best practices in teaching and learning.

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