

Evaluation of Social Studies and Civic Education Curriculum Content at All Levels of the Nigerian Educational System

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Abstract

This paper presents a critical evaluation of Social Studies and Civic Education curriculum content across all levels of the Nigerian educational system. Against the backdrop of rising civic disengagement, social disintegration and democratic fragility, it argues that while these subjects are strategically placed to promote responsible citizenship and national unity, their current curriculum content remains largely outdated, fragmented and misaligned with contemporary civic realities. At the primary level, the curriculum introduces basic civic ideas but lacks depth and contextual relevance. At the secondary level, it emphasizes rote learning rather than active civic participation, while at the tertiary level; Civic Education is inconsistently implemented or marginalized. Systemic challenges such as poor teacher preparation, inadequate resources and weak policy prioritization further hamper curriculum effectiveness. This paper also identifies emerging civic issues, including digital citizenship, climate change, gender equity and youth activism that are conspicuously absent in current curricula. Drawing on comparative insights from global best practices, the paper advocates for a transformative curriculum reform that integrates experiential learning, critical thinking, and real-world civic engagement. It calls for a deliberate reconceptualization of these subjects as foundational pillars of democratic education in Nigeria. Only through such strategic reforms can Social Studies and Civic Education fulfill their intended roles in shaping active, informed and socially responsible citizens.

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Introduction

In the contemporary Nigerian context, the significance of Social Studies and Civic Education has never been more pronounced. As the nation grapples with rising insecurity, political apathy, ethno-religious tension and a declining sense of national identity, these subjects stand out as vital instruments for cultivating democratic values, civic responsibility and social cohesion (Muhammad & Gaya, 2025). Yet, despite their strategic importance, the curricular frameworks governing their implementation remain largely static, outdated and misaligned with the dynamic socio-political realities of 21st-century Nigeria.

Historically introduced to nurture informed and active citizens, Social Studies and after Civic Education were designed to transmit values of patriotism, human rights, political literacy and cultural awareness (Nwabudike et al. 2024). However, recent analyses have pointed to significant deficiencies in content quality and pedagogical delivery, especially across various levels of the Nigerian educational system (Lawrence & Ahmed, 2025). At the primary and secondary levels, the curriculum is often rigid and overburdened with abstract knowledge, leaving little room for participatory learning and practical civic engagement. At the tertiary level, these subjects are inconsistently integrated, with some institutions treating them as electives or completely excluding them.

Furthermore, systemic challenges such as insufficient teacher preparation, lack of instructional resources and a weak culture of democratic engagement exacerbate the inadequacies of the curriculum (Ibrahim & Jibia, 2024). The urgency for reform is magnified by the growing global emphasis on digital citizenship, intercultural competence, environmental sustainability and youth civic innovation; all of which remain marginal or absent in Nigeria's civic education framework (Enamhe et al. 2025).

Given this backdrop, this paper takes a critical stance on the current state of Social Studies and Civic Education curricula in Nigeria. It posits for a strategic repositioning of these subjects, not merely as academic content but as transformative tools for nation-building, democratic resilience and responsible global citizenship.

Conceptual Clarifications

Social Studies

It is a very difficult task to give universally acceptable definition of the concept Social Studies because it has been defined in different ways by different authors due to their own perception about what Social Studies entails. Notwithstanding, a brief x-ray of some of the definitions are presented for easy understanding. Social Studies is a discipline that thrives on diverse perspectives, critical thinking and the exploration of societal issues. It has long been identified as a veritable tool for reshaping the society. According to Arisi (2015), Social Studies is an organized and integrated study of man and environment both physical and social to help acquire skills, attitude and actions for the purpose of creating effective citizens. Shamija (2013) views Social Studies as a programme of study which a society uses to inculcate knowledge, skills, attitudes and values it considers important concerning the relationship human beings have among themselves in their community, society and world at large. Kissock (2012) defines Social Studies as a subject of study which a society uses to instill in students the knowledge, skills, attitudes and actions it considers important concerning the relationship which human beings have with one other, their world and themselves. These definitions suggest that Social Studies is a vehicle through which desired culture, values and norms of the society are being inculcated to its young ones.

Civic Education

Civic Education refers to the study and practice of the rights, responsibilities, and roles of citizens in a democratic society. It equips individuals, especially students, with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes necessary to participate actively and responsibly in civic and political life. According to Arizka (2020) Civic Education is a process of fostering civic competence, which includes knowledge, skills, values and attitudes necessary for effective participation in a democratic society. It aims at the development of individuals who are aware of their rights and responsibilities and are capable of contributing to the nation-state constructively. Civic Education broadly refers to the cultivation of the virtues, knowledge and skills necessary for political participation in a democracy. It involves understanding institutions, developing critical thinking about civic life and motivating engagement through informed citizenship

Curriculum

There has been no consensus among scholars and curriculum specialists as to the precise definition of curriculum as well as its meaning. The term has meant different things to different people at different times and culture. Some say it is the accumulated tradition of organized

knowledge contained in the school subjects. The curriculum refers to the planned content and learning experiences provided by educational institutions. It encompasses the objectives, content, learning experiences, and assessment methods that guide the educational process. According to Ugbede (2025) citing El-Astal (2023) describes curriculum as prescriptive content that illustrates what will be taught in a given educational program, who will teach, who will be taught, with what tools and in what context, with what effect and how learners will be assessed. These definitions highlight the comprehensive nature of curriculum, encompassing not just the content but also the pedagogical methods, contextual factors and assessment strategies. One of the foundational ideas in curriculum theory is that it serves as a bridge between societal needs and educational practice.

Evaluation

Evaluation is the process of assessing the quality, effectiveness or value of something, such as programmes, projects, policies, products and academic performance. It involves collecting data, analyzing information, making judgements, identifying strengths and weaknesses and informing decision-making. According to Alachi and Agbum (2017) evaluation is a selective exercise that systematically and objectively assess progress towards the achievement of an outcome. It is a continuous process which involves assessment of differing scope and depth carried out at several points in time. Evaluation refers to the assigning of a value or judgment to an entity in relation to some criteria. Example, “civilian regime is better than military regime”; this decision or judgement made here depends on the achievement of people in both regimes.

Evaluation is also looked at as a process of finding out how far the learning experiences so developed and organized are actually producing the desired results. It usually identifies the strength and weaknesses of the plan. Drake (1975) defines evaluation as a continuous process of collecting valid and reliable data for the purpose of comparing programme outcomes with programmes objectives to provide useful information for making sound decisions. The definitions above are all concerned with programmes outcomes in relation to programme objectives. Hence, the process of evaluation involves identifying the strengths and weakness of the plans.

Curriculum Evaluation

Curriculum evaluation assesses the effectiveness and quality of a curriculum in achieving its intended goals and outcome. It involves determining strengths and weaknesses, assessing student

learning and informing decision-making. Curriculum evaluation according Bharvad (2010) is a process by which we attempt to gauge the value and effectiveness of any educational activity, be it a curriculum project, policy or a teaching-learning sequence, by systematically collecting and analyzing information to inform decision-making. Hussain et al. (2011) see curriculum evaluation as the process of collecting data and making judgments about the worth and effectiveness of a curriculum. It includes a systematic analysis of the curriculum's content, objectives, instructional methods and learning outcomes. These definitions emphasize that curriculum evaluation is not just about testing student achievement but involves a holistic, evidence-based assessment of the curriculum's design, delivery and impact.

The Role of Social Studies and Civic Education in Nation-Building

Social Studies and Civic Education are indispensable components of national development strategies in modern societies. In the Nigerian context, these disciplines are not only academic subjects but also tools of ideological transmission and socio-political engineering. Their core objective is to cultivate citizens who are knowledgeable, active and responsible in a pluralistic and democratic society (Morah et al. 2024).

At the philosophical level, Social Studies draws upon interdisciplinary knowledge History, Geography, Economics, Political Science and ethics to foster an integrated understanding of human society and global interdependence. Civic Education, in contrast, is explicitly political and participatory in nature. It is designed to empower learners with the knowledge, skills and attitudes required for informed political engagement, legal awareness and community responsibility (Njoku & Busayo, 2025).

Both subjects serve as mechanisms for identity formation, value reorientation and conflict resolution. In Nigeria, a country characterized by deep ethno-religious diversity and political instability, the strategic importance of Civic Education cannot be overstated. Scholars argue that it plays a preventive role against youth radicalization, electoral violence and political illiteracy, which are rampant across various regions of the country (Ibeh & Agwuna, 2024). Social Studies, on the other hand, supports nation-building by encouraging cultural understanding, tolerance and critical engagement with societal issues such as corruption, inequality and environmental degradation (Anyanwu & Dafiell, 2024).

However, the realization of these goals hinges on the relevance, inclusiveness and responsiveness of the curriculum. As such, both disciplines must evolve from traditional content

delivery to transformative pedagogy, one that integrates real-life civic action, experiential learning and digital literacy to reflect the changing dynamics of citizenship in a globalized world (Enamhe, Ambe & Enamhe, 2025).

Thus, Social Studies and Civic Education are more than subjects; they are strategic instruments of civic empowerment and national transformation. A curriculum that fails to optimize their full potential risks producing generations of politically disengaged and socially disoriented citizens; an outcome that Nigeria can ill afford.

Primary Education

At the primary level, Social Studies and Civic Education are introduced as foundational subjects intended to instill basic moral values, civic habits and national consciousness. While the curriculum provides early exposure to themes such as family, community and national symbols, it suffers from oversimplification and a lack of practical engagement. According to Aladejana and Olatoye (2019), many primary school curricula present civic topics in abstract formats, which limit meaningful connections to learners' lived experiences. Furthermore, the teaching methodology remains teacher-centered, emphasizing memorization over inquiry and participation.

Curricular documents often omit contemporary civic concerns such as environmental responsibility, children's rights and digital safety, which are increasingly important in a globalized society. Nnachi (2018) notes that the failure to address evolving societal issues at this foundational level limits children's capacity for critical thought and civic awareness from an early age.

Junior and Senior Secondary Education

At the secondary level, Civic Education is treated as a core subject, especially in the senior years, while Social Studies is typically emphasized at the junior level. Theoretically, this stage should serve as a developmental bridge between foundational knowledge and critical civic reasoning. However, studies reveal that the curriculum remains heavily text-based, content-heavy, and minimally participatory (Ezegbe & Okeke, 2021). Students often perceive these subjects as examination hurdles rather than transformative learning experiences. Ajiboye and Odetola (2017) argue that although the secondary curriculum introduces crucial topics such as constitutional rights, electoral processes and national integration, it lacks depth in

implementation. Teachers often skip active learning strategies such as debates, simulations, or community projects. Moreover, inadequate teacher training and the absence of continuous curriculum review make it difficult to keep the content relevant.

Additionally, Onwe and Ikegbunam (2020) observe that the increasing presence of disinformation and youth radicalization through social media requires urgent integration of media literacy and digital citizenship in the curriculum.

Tertiary Education

In tertiary institutions, Civic Education is inconsistently integrated. In many Nigerian universities, it appears as part of General Studies (GST) courses or is absent entirely, depending on institutional discretion. This fragmented approach weakens the continuity of civic education and undermines its potential to shape responsible graduates. According to Nwabudike et al. (2024), the lack of curriculum coherence at the tertiary level fails to address complex civic challenges such as corruption, governance, civil disobedience, and democratic accountability.

Furthermore, research by Edewor and Osifo (2015) indicated that the pedagogy at this level is often disconnected from Nigeria's socio-political realities, as it relies more on outdated literature and less on experiential, community-driven learning models. Tertiary institutions are also slow to adopt interdisciplinary or global citizenship education models that integrate environmental sustainability, gender equity, and social innovation (Enamhe et al., 2025). This limits students' readiness to engage actively in democratic society or contribute meaningfully to policy development.

Systemic Challenges Affecting Curriculum Effectiveness

Despite the strategic placement of Social Studies and Civic Education within Nigeria's educational framework, their impact has been undermined by a range of systemic and structural challenges. These impediments compromise both the quality of civic instruction and the transformative potential of the curriculum.

1. **Inadequate Teacher Preparation and Professional Development:** One of the most critical issues is the insufficient training of teachers in civic pedagogy. Many Social Studies and Civic Education instructors, particularly at the primary and secondary levels, lack specialized training in civic competencies, human rights education, or democratic practices. According to Ibrahim and Jibia (2024), most teachers rely on outdated lecture-

based methods and struggle to incorporate participatory, inquiry-driven approaches. Without continuous professional development and retraining, educators are ill-equipped to translate curriculum objectives into meaningful learning outcomes.

2. **Obsolete and Rigid Curriculum Content:** The existing curriculum is often static, lacking flexibility to adapt to new civic realities. Emerging themes such as climate change, online misinformation, youth political movements, and gender equality are either absent or poorly represented. As Ajiboye and Odetola (2017) observed, this rigidity disconnects students from lived civic realities, turning the classroom into a theoretical space devoid of real-world engagement.
3. **Resource Deficiencies and Infrastructure Gaps:** Insufficient access to teaching resources, civic engagement materials, and ICT tools hinders effective curriculum delivery. Enamhe, Ambe and Enamhe (2025) emphasize that experiential learning is nearly impossible without audiovisual materials, community engagement projects, or functioning civic laboratories. In underfunded public schools, even basic textbooks are outdated, contributing to rote learning and civic apathy.
4. **Assessment Models that Prioritize Memorization:** Assessment practices further exacerbate the problem. Most examinations in Civic Education emphasize rote memorization over critical thinking, problem-solving, or real-life application. Ezegebe and Okeke (2021) report that students are often tested on definitions and slogans, rather than evaluated on their civic reasoning or capacity to engage in societal issues.
5. **Weak Policy Implementation and Low Political Will:** Although several national education policies highlight the importance of Civic Education such as the National Policy on Education (2013 Revised Edition) but actual implementation is marred by inconsistency and neglect. Curriculum review cycles are infrequent, and political stakeholders rarely prioritize civic education in funding or reform agendas. As Nnachi (2018) points out, this low-level policy commitment reflects broader governance challenges and a lack of understanding of Civic Education's strategic value.
6. **Cultural and Ideological Constraints:** In some regions, local cultural beliefs, religious ideologies, or political tensions shape how civic content is interpreted or avoided entirely. Morah, et al. (2024), this creates disparities in how the curriculum is taught across Nigeria's geopolitical zones, undermining national cohesion and curricular standardization.

Emerging Issues and Curriculum Gaps

As societies evolve, so must their civic education frameworks. In the case of Nigeria, while the foundational goals of Social Studies and Civic Education remain relevant, the curriculum has not kept pace with global and national developments. Several critical civic themes have either been superficially included or entirely neglected, creating deep curricular gaps that undermine the effectiveness of civic instruction. These include:

- a. **Absence of Digital Citizenship Education:** In an age dominated by social media, artificial intelligence and online political activism, digital citizenship has become a core competency for 21st-century civic engagement. However, Nigeria's current Social Studies and Civic Education curriculum lacks structured content on topics such as online safety, cyber ethics, media literacy and digital activism. As observed by Onwe and Ikegbunam (2020), the absence of these topics exposes students to misinformation and cyber threats and limits their ability to engage responsibly in digital democratic spaces.
- b. **Climate Change and Environmental Responsibility:** Despite Nigeria's vulnerability to flooding, desertification and environmental degradation, issues of climate literacy and environmental justice are either marginalized or missing in civic instruction. Enamhe et al. (2025) argue that the curriculum fails to position students as environmental stewards, thus neglecting a vital dimension of global citizenship education.
- c. **Gender Equity and Social Inclusion:** Another major gap in the curriculum is the weak integration of gender equity and social justice themes. Gender roles are often treated superficially and key topics such as gender-based violence, inclusive governance, and rights of marginalized groups are barely addressed. According to Edewor and Osifo (2015), this limits learners' ability to critically analyze social hierarchies and challenge discrimination.
- d. **Youth Political Engagement and Civic Innovation:** The current curriculum often portrays civic responsibility in passive terms, obeying laws and respecting authority rather than encouraging active participation, advocacy, or innovation. This static model is misaligned with the rise of youth-led civic movements in Nigeria, such as the #EndSARS protests, OBidient Movement. Njoku and Busayo (2025) stress that excluding such civic realities from classroom discussions alienates young people and perpetuates civic disengagement.

- e. **Human Rights and Global Citizenship:** Human rights education remains underdeveloped in most Nigerian civic curricula. Students are taught abstract constitutional rights but are rarely exposed to their global equivalents or the mechanisms of redress. Nwabudike et al. (2024) emphasize the need to embed global citizenship frameworks that promote human dignity, intercultural dialogue and international cooperation as outlined in UNESCO's sustainable development goal (SDG) 4.7.

Comparative Perspectives

To enhance the relevance and effectiveness of Nigeria's Social Studies and Civic Education curriculum, it is instructive to examine how other nations approach civic learning. Comparative analysis reveals that countries that successfully cultivate active, informed and responsible citizens do so through integrated, participatory and future-facing curricula. Nigeria stands to benefit by adapting elements from these international models while contextualizing them to its socio-political realities.

Finland: Civic Competence through Critical Thinking

Finland's approach to Civic Education emphasizes critical thinking, debate and student-led inquiry. Civic content is embedded across subjects, ensuring that students develop a deep understanding of governance, social justice and sustainability from a young age. According to Kiili and Mäkinen (2020), Finland prioritizes media literacy and democratic deliberation, training learners to navigate complex political information. This contrasts with Nigeria's fact-recall model and offers a model of how critical inquiry can be institutionalized in civic instruction.

South Africa: Post-Apartheid Curriculum Transformation

South Africa's Life Orientation curriculum integrates Civic Education, human rights, and community service. Developed in response to the country's history of systemic injustice, it centers on democratic values, diversity and social cohesion. Waghid (2016) argues that this values-based curriculum has helped shape post-apartheid citizenship by promoting ubuntu (shared humanity) and confronting historical inequities. Nigeria, also facing issues of national disunity, could adapt South Africa's reconciliatory civic frameworks to strengthen its social fabric.

Rwanda: Civic Education as Reconciliation Tool

Following the 1994 genocide, Rwanda integrated Civic Education (locally called *Itorero*) into schools and community life as a national healing and peace-building mechanism. The curriculum focuses on reconciliation, patriotism and anti-genocide ideology. According to Uwamariya and Dusabe (2021), Rwanda's model effectively combines formal schooling with community-based learning. Nigeria could learn from Rwanda's post-conflict civic engagement model to address its own challenges with ethnic violence and insurgency.

United States: Experiential and Local Civic Engagement

In the U.S., Civic Education often includes service-learning, mock elections, student government and town hall simulations. The emphasis is on participatory democracy rather than theoretical knowledge. According to Kahne and Westheimer (2018), such models create "justice-oriented citizens" who do not just obey laws but advocate for change. Nigeria's curriculum, by contrast, largely lacks such experiential components.

Lessons for Nigeria

From these global models, several best practices emerge:

1. Integrate civic values across disciplines rather than isolate them as standalone subjects.
2. Use experiential learning (debates, service, advocacy) to build real-world civic skills.
3. Update content regularly to reflect contemporary issues such as digital rights, climate justice and gender equality.
4. Localize content to address Nigeria's unique socio-cultural dynamics, just as Rwanda and South Africa did post-conflict.
5. Institutionalize civic learning at tertiary levels, including within technical and vocational programs.
6. If Nigeria aspires to build a robust democratic culture, its civic education curriculum must shift from passive knowledge delivery to active civic formation.

Conclusion

Social Studies and Civic Education are not peripheral academic subjects; they are foundational instruments for shaping democratic values, fostering responsible citizenship and cultivating national cohesion. Yet, as this paper has shown, the current state of these curricula

across Nigeria's educational system, particularly at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels reveals serious conceptual, structural and pedagogical deficiencies. From outdated content and fragmented policy implementation to inadequate teacher training and exclusion of emerging civic issues, these weaknesses collectively undermine the transformative potential of civic education in Nigeria. The global comparative models discussed, ranging from Finland's critical thinking pedagogy to Rwanda's civic healing initiatives, offer powerful lessons that Nigeria can adapt. Civic education must be reimagined not as a passive, theoretical endeavor but as a dynamic, participatory process deeply embedded in learners' lived experiences. This requires national curriculum reform, experiential teaching strategies, policy coherence and consistent teacher retraining.

Importantly, addressing the current gaps is not just a pedagogical necessity, it is a national imperative. As Nigeria confronts rising political apathy, misinformation, insecurity, and democratic fragility, only a civic curriculum that empowers, enlightens and engages the youth can serve as a sustainable response. It is therefore imperative that policymakers, educators, civil society actors and curriculum developers take coordinated action to reposition Civic and Social Studies education as core pillars of national development. Without such reform, Nigeria risks nurturing generations of citizens ill-equipped to uphold democratic ideals or contribute meaningfully to the nation's progress.

Recommendations

For Social Studies and Civic Education to fulfill their transformative potential in Nigeria, a deliberate recalibration of both policy direction and classroom practice is essential. These reforms must address foundational, structural and content-related challenges while aligning with global civic education trends and local socio-political realities.

- 1. Comprehensive Curriculum Audit and Reform:** The Federal Ministry of Education and the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) must initiate a national curriculum audit to identify outdated, irrelevant, or redundant content. This audit should be participatory, involving educators, curriculum experts, civil society, youth representatives and local communities. As recommended by Nwabudike et al. (2024), the revised curriculum must incorporate current civic issues such as climate change, digital rights, gender equity, election integrity and civic activism.

2. **Integration of Experiential Civic Learning:** Civic education must shift from theory-based to experiential learning models. Activities such as mock elections, school parliaments, civic debates, community service projects and digital campaigns should be institutionalized. Kahne and Westheimer (2018) affirm that these strategies develop "justice-oriented citizens" equipped for democratic participation. This reform would also engage learners emotionally and ethically not just cognitively.
3. **Mandatory Civic Engagement Projects at All Levels:** Social Studies and Civic Education should include compulsory civic action components, such as service-learning or project-based assessment, at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. These projects should address real community issues and promote agency among youth. Rwanda's model of blending formal and community-based civic education (Uwamariya & Dusabe, 2021) provides a replicable framework.
4. **Teacher Retraining and Civic Pedagogy Certification:** Teachers must be retrained through regular professional development programs, emphasizing inquiry-based learning, critical discourse facilitation and technology use in civic instruction. Pre-service teacher programs should include modules in contemporary civic issues, peace education and rights-based teaching. Ibrahim and Jibia (2024) recommend a national civic pedagogy certification scheme to standardize quality across regions.
5. **Inclusion of Civic Education in All Tertiary Institutions:** Civic Education should be institutionalized as a core general course across universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education. This ensures that students in all disciplines; science, engineering, arts, graduate with a sense of civic responsibility and national consciousness. Edewor and Osifo (2015) stress that civic disengagement among educated youth stems from curricular marginalization at the tertiary level.
6. **Strengthen Policy Commitment and Funding:** Policymakers must elevate Civic Education as a strategic national priority. This includes allocating targeted funding for curriculum development, teaching materials, teacher training and civic labs. Furthermore, frequent curriculum reviews, every 5–7 years, should be mandated by policy to keep content responsive to evolving societal needs.
7. **Promote Regional Adaptability and Local Content:** While maintaining national standards, civic content should allow for regional customization. For instance, civic themes in the Niger Delta might emphasize environmental justice, while the Northeast might focus

on peacebuilding and de-radicalization. This approach enhances relevance and contextual ownership, as recommended by Morah et al. (2024).

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