PROMOTING CIVIC COMPETENCE THROUGH
SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION
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As an academic discipline, the main goal under which social studies operate is to offer secondary students with a plethora of learning experiences where certain virtues are given the opportunity to be nurtured and developed (Zevin, 2013). These virtues include improved interpersonal relationships, higher level of self-realization, advanced social and political participation, unity with national goals, and improved scientific and technological understanding. Such is the case because the primary concern of social studies is to understand individuals’ spatial, temporal, and geographical relationships (Ritter, Powell, & Hawley, 2007). Simply put it, the interaction of people with one another and with the society as a whole is the phenomenon being explored in social studies. As Barton, McCully, and Marks (2004) said, when referring to social studies in general, there is unity of thought among academic scholars that man’s life is the center of its endeavours.

However, Britzman (2003) claimed that among the aspects of the society as a whole, the main focus of social studies is on the promotion of civic education. By civic education, he meant developing civic competence among secondary school learners through integrating knowledge, attitudes, and skills in proposing resolutions to the problems, challenges, and issues that societies encounter. Along with the promotion of civic education, however, Zevin (2013) argued that the dynamism of society should also be recognized and explored accordingly. His argument is anchored on the fact that knowledge about the society as well as the nature of knowledge itself is in a constant process of change. Seen in this light, social studies will be able to promote civic competence by fostering modern approaches in giving solutions to the contemporary issues and problems that societies confront.

Given the above social studies concept, social studies as a school subject should primarily be concerned in developing “intelligent, responsible and self-directing citizens who are expected to positively explore opportunities to develop their own potentialities and to contribute their maximum effort to the improvement of group living within the societal framework of the nation” (Dynneson & Gross, 1999:67). In other words, while part and parcel of the outcomes that social studies education should bring about are students’ individual development and improved relationships with others, the culminating realization of these outcomes is the betterment of the
society as whole. Students are, through social studies education, expected to contribute to the development of the entire society.

Understood in the above context, social studies teachers are exhorted to put emphasis on civic education. This means that in carrying out their pedagogical tasks, their primary consideration is the promotion of civic awareness among students. A brief discussion of what civic education is will therefore be devoted.

According to Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005), civic education refers to the educational system whose chief educational goal is to develop upright civic values among the learners. Furthermore, it seeks to develop students who are aware, informed, responsible, and active citizens of the country. While civic awareness is the theoretical aspect of civic education, civic participation is its practical counterpart. Ritter et al. (2007) support this view as they argue that the main goal of civic education is the inculcation of morally sound virtues of good citizenship which in the long run must be exhibited by learners through value characterization.

Given these views about social studies education, it must cease as an armchair classroom subject. More than the acquisition of knowledge, the promotion of civic competence and virtues of responsible citizenship should be emphasized in social studies education.

References