

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SOCIAL LEARNING THEORIES IN THE TEACHING OF SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT: *Social learning theories deal with the ability of learners to imbibe and display the behaviors exhibited within their environment. In the society, children are surrounded by many influential models, such as parents within the family, characters on mass/social media, friends within their peer group, religion, other members of the society, and the school. Children pay attention to some of these agents of socialization and imbibe the behaviours exhibited. At a later time they may imitate the behavior they have observed regardless of whether the behavior is appropriate or not, but there are a number of processes that make it more likely that a child will reproduce the behavior that its society deems appropriate for its sex and age. This paper discusses the implications of social learning theories on Social Studies education, and how Social Studies teachers can apply it towards achieving the goals and objectives of the discipline.*

KEY WORDS: Social learning theories and social studies education.

INTRODUCTION

Albert Bandura (1977) in McLeod (2011) stated that behaviour is learned from the environment through the process of observational learning. Social Learning Theory originated from Albert Bandura, who believed that behaviourism alone could not explain all there is about learning. He believed that behaviour and the environment affected each other. The changes Bandura observed in a child's behaviour after watching an adult show aggression triggered him to his social learning theory. Bandura believed we could control our own behaviour through self regulation. Self regulation requires a person to self-observe, make judgments about our environment and ourselves, and self-response. People both influence and are influenced by the world around them. Social learning theory also known as observational learning, occurs when an observer's behavior changes after viewing the behavior of a model. An observer's behaviour can be affected by the positive or negative display of behaviour seen.

CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS:

Social learning theory: Social (or Observational) Learning Theory stipulates that people can learn new behaviours by observing others. This also refers to the reciprocal relationship between social characteristics of the environment, how they are perceived by individuals, and how motivated and able a person is to reproduce behaviours they see happening around them. According to Nabavi (2014), this theory is based on the idea that we learn from our interactions with others in a social context. Separately, by observing the behaviours of others,

people develop similar behaviors. After observing the behaviour of others, people assimilate and imitate that behavior, especially if their observational experiences are positive ones or include rewards related to the observed behaviour.

Social Studies Education: Edinyang, Unimke, Ubi, Opo & Iwok (2015) defined Social Studies as the study of human behaviour in relation with the environment that provides a stage for the cultivation of said behaviour. Social studies according to this definition tries to understand the reason for human behaviour and the situations in the environment responsible for them. Edinyang and Effiom (2014) viewed social studies as the field of study that focuses on man in his environment, the relationships and interactions between man and his environment, and seeks to equip him with skills, values, and attitudes needed to identify with, and conquer the problems found in his environment to make his social life worth the bother. Social Studies education according to Mezieobi in Edinyang and Effiom (2014), can therefore be defined as the arrangement of content, determination of set objectives, organizing learners activities and materials, evaluating and providing satisfactory learning experiences for the realization of desirable changes in learner's behaviour.

Social Learning Theory of Albert Bandura (1977): Lou (2013) opined that Bandura proposed the concept of social cognitive theory. A general contention is that much of the development in human cognition is explained by the interplay of internal personal factors in the form of cognitive, affective and biological events; behavior; and environmental events. According to Nabavi (2014), Bandura in 1961 conducted his famous experiment known as the Bobo doll experiment, to study patterns of behaviour, by social learning theory, and that similar behaviours were learned by individuals shaping their own behaviour after the actions of models. Bandura's results from the Bobo Doll Experiment changed the course of modern psychology, and were widely credited for helping shift the focus in academic psychology from pure behaviourism to cognitive. He demonstrated that children learn and imitate behaviours which they have observed in other people. According to Banyard & Grayson (2000), Bandura believed that direct reinforcement could not account for all types of learning, and that people can learn new information and behaviours by watching other people. According to Shaffer (2005), people learn from one another, via: Observation; Imitation; and Modeling.

Observational Learning: According to Lou (2013), in his famous Bobo doll experiment, Bandura demonstrated that children learn and imitate behaviours they have observed in other people. The children in Bandura's studies observed an adult acting violently toward a Bobo doll. When the children were later allowed to play in a room with the Bobo doll, they began to imitate the aggressive actions they had previously observed.

Imitation Process: This has to do with the ability to replicate a behaviour or action. The child who observes a certain behaviour repeatedly is expected at some point to be able to imitate and reproduce said behaviour.

Modeling process: it is important to note that not all observed behaviours are effectively learned. For the process to be successful, the model and observer must abide by the following as observed by O'Rorke (2006), who explained how the following modeling processes influence learning.

- a. Attention: The person must first pay attention to the model.
- b. Retention: The observer must be able to remember the behaviour that has been observed.
- c. Reproduction: The third condition is the ability to replicate the behaviour that the model has just demonstrated.
- d. Motivation: The final necessary ingredient for modeling to occur is motivation, as learners must want to demonstrate what they have learned.

Social Learning Theory of Julian Rotter (1954): Rotter's interactionist position holds that human behaviour is based largely on the interaction of people with their meaningful environments. Rotter believes that, although personality can change at any time, it has a basic unity that preserves it from changing as a result of minor experiences. McLeod (2011) supported Rotter's work with the view that empirical law of effect assumes that people choose a course of action that advances them toward an anticipated goal. Human behaviour is most accurately predicted by an understanding of four variables:

Behaviour Potential: this is the possibility that a particular response will occur at a given time and place in relation to its likely reinforcement.

Expectancy: People's expectancy in any given situation is their confidence that a particular reinforcement will follow a specific behaviour in a specific situation or situations. Expectancies can be either general or specific, and the overall likelihood of success is a function of both generalized and specific expectancies.

Reinforcement Value: this is a person's preference for any particular reinforcement over other reinforcements if all are equally likely to occur. Internal reinforcement is the individual's perception of an event, whereas external reinforcement refers to society's evaluation of an event. Reinforcement-reinforcement sequences suggest that the value of an event is a function of one's expectation that a particular reinforcement will lead to future reinforcements.

Psychological Situation: The psychological situation is that part of the external and internal world to which a person is responding. Behaviour is a function of the interaction of people with their meaningful environment.

Skinner's Operant Learning Theory (1953): This theory is also known as radical behaviorism. Skinner in Shaffer (2005) proposed that both animals and humans will repeat acts that lead to favorable outcomes. Skinner's operant learning theory emphasizes that the direction in which we develop depends on external stimuli which could be a reinforcement or punishment. The human behaviour according to Skinner can take many forms and can emerge or disappear depending on whether they have positive or negative consequences. A bad behaviour can be reinforced when the victims continue to give in or yield to it, another person who is punished will learn to suppress such habits or behaviour. Schaefer (2008) opined that sanctions and reinforcements for good behaviour could include praise, a word of gratitude, a pat on the back, or a medal, while fines, threats and confinement could serve as negative sanction for bad behaviour.

Significance of Social Learning theories on Social Studies Education:

It should be noted that what gives significance to relayed influence is that observers can acquire enduring attitudes, emotional reactions, and behavioural proclivities toward persons, places or things that have been associated with modeling. Social Studies embraces the various fields which involves past and current human behaviour and interactions, helps to project the positive values of human behaviour and the consequences of negative social vices. Social learning theories deals with the understanding of how and why individuals form emotional attachments, adopt gender roles, make friends, learn to abide by moral rules, and change in countless other ways. According to Lawal and Obebe (2011), the subject is one that encourages attention to be given to the process of living and working together, using of the environment to met basic human needs, customs, institutions, values and life situations, cultural heritage and its dynamic on-going characteristics which are necessary for nation building in Nigeria.

The teachers of Social Studies in the informal education setting which was indigenous were mostly made up of parents, community elders and relations of the learners. The learners according to Edinyang, et al (2015) were actively involved in the teaching-learning process as they were expected to replicate the content of the unwritten curriculum. The indigenous curriculum is in line with Albert Bandura's theory on modeling and imitation. A variety of teaching methods such as role-playing, games, observation, demonstration, imitation, inquiring, self teaching and learning and peer teaching were used to transmit societal norms and values to the younger generation.

Watson in Shaffer (2005) opined that an infant is a tabula rasa (an infant has no prior knowledge, and so is referred to as a clean sheet) to be written on by experience. As a social learning theorist, Watson believed that how children will turn out will depend entirely on their rearing environment and the ways in which their parents and other significant people in their lives treat them and behave around them. He viewed development as a continuous process of behavioural change that is shaped by the person's unique environment, and may differ from person to person.

For the proper and effective transmission of Social Studies goals and objectives, attitudes, skills and aptitude, the characters found in the learner's environment must also be in accordance with these attributes that Social Studies education aims to impart, as they have an influence over the learning outcome of the students. Being able to model after a desirable character will not only build the learner's confidence and character, but will also determine to what extent the learner will be accepted within the school and the community, hence the achievement of Social Studies goals.

Learners become self-regulated when they set learning goals on their own, monitor their progress toward the goals, and assess the effectiveness of their efforts. The theory helps explain events such as why teachers' describe their thought processes as they demonstrate skills that are effective, and why students who self-regulate, achieve higher than their peers who don't. Lou (2013) is of the view that both cognitive and behavioural learning principles are used to generate

desired behaviors in the learners; the combined use works better compared to the use of behavioural principles alone. The learner's thoughts serve as the discriminative stimuli. This technique lends well to self-instruction, wherein the learner teaches himself.

Bandura in Lou (2013) defined self-efficacy as the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations, or a person's belief in his or her ability to succeed in a particular situation. These beliefs begin to form in early childhood as children deal with a wide variety of experiences, tasks, and situations. However, the growth of self-efficacy does not end during youth, but continues to evolve throughout life as people acquire new skills and experiences. O'Rorke (2006) opined that observers attend to models when they believe they are capable of learning or performing the modeled behaviour. Observation of similar models affects self-efficacy, as it challenges the observer's ability to replicate the behavior. These social learning theories therefore imply that exposing the learners to the right behaviour in Social Studies classrooms will help in achieving the goals and objectives of Social Studies, and build individuals who have the right attitude and values to live within the Nigerian society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made to guide Social Studies education and curriculum to the full use of the social learning theories to achieve Social Studies objectives:

1. Social Studies teachers should be careful of the behaviours displayed in front of the students to avoid creating the wrong impressions.
2. Parents and Social Studies teachers could suggest admirable role models for the learners to follow.
3. Good and healthy social interaction patterns should be encouraged in Social Studies classrooms.
4. Students learn fast through what they see, hear, feel in the learning environment, hence instructional materials that can be manipulated should be frequently used in social studies classrooms.
5. Teaching methods such as role playing and demonstration, simulation and games, dramatization should be used to teach appropriate behaviours, and also prolongs knowledge retention.
6. Social Studies teachers should efficiently punish bad behaviours and reinforce the right ones to help develop the right attitude in the learners.

CONCLUSION

Social learning theories emphasizes on changes in behaviour and learning through the observation and imitation of the actions and behaviours in the environment. Social Studies education tries to models the child's behaviour to reflect the acceptable norms, attitudes and values acceptable in the society. Social studies education which is mostly affective in nature largely depends on the attitudes that are obtainable within a given environment. As different

norms are acceptable in different communities, Social Studies deals with the study of man's way of life in his direct community and tries to pass it onto the younger generation for continuity.

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