

## **AN ASSESSMENT OF TEACHING METHODS USED BY SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS IN JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN EDO STATE, NIGERIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The emerging realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century societies have necessitated the call for pedagogical renewal in the social studies classroom. Evidence suggests that the traditional teacher-dominated instructional methods are unsuitable for contemporary social studies classrooms. This study seeks to contribute to the search for optimal instructional methods by examining the teaching methods used by Social Studies teachers in junior secondary schools in Edo State of Nigeria. The study adopted a survey research design utilizing questionnaire and observation of actual classroom teaching. Two hypotheses were addressed in this study. A sample of 173 teachers was randomly selected from 150 junior secondary schools in ten local government areas of Edo state. Out of the 173 teachers, 50 teachers were randomly selected for classroom observation. Data was collected and analyzed using Z- test. The result revealed that majority of the social studies teachers was not using the appropriate teaching methods in social studies classrooms. Findings from the classroom observation revealed that teacher-centered pedagogy was the dominant method of curriculum instruction. Learner-centered constructivist pedagogy was completely neglected by virtually all the teachers observed. Recommendations were made including the need for prospective teachers to have thorough understanding of concept and benefits of learner-centered instructional methods in order to improve students' learning and facilitate instruction in the social studies classroom.*

**Keywords:** *Social studies, teaching methods, secondary schools, Nigeria*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Social studies is one of the core subjects of the Universal Basic Education in Nigeria. Over the past half century when social studies was introduced into the Nigeria school curricula, effort has been made by various governments and relevant local and international stakeholders to ensure a smooth integration of the subject into the Nigerian school system, particularly at the level of the universal basic education comprising primary and junior high school. Although variations exist in the definition of the subject by different educationists (Jarolimek, 1977; Kissock, 1981; Mezieobi, 1991; Oketa, 2001, Okam, 2002; Fadeiye, 2005; Bozimo&Ikwumelu, 2008), all are agreed on certain underlying ideas, generalizations and features of social studies. The National Council on Social Studies (NCSS, 2000), in summarizing these views of social studies points out that the objective of social studies is to prepare young people to be humane, rational thinkers and participating citizens in a world that is becoming increasingly interdependent.

A growing body of research suggests that models of education designed to meet the needs of the colonial past are inadequate for the myriad challenges and opportunities facing 21<sup>st</sup> century students in Nigeria and other developing countries of sub-Saharan Africa (UNESCO, 2000, Tabulawa, 2003; Verspoor, 2008; Leyendecker et al. 2008; Chisholm &Leyendecker,

2008; Guro and Weber, 2010; Kunje, 2002; Vavrus, 2009; Vavrus et al. 2011). New educational environments require different ways of designing learning experiences for students as well as new approaches to teaching and assessment. The organizational structure, content of formal education, examination structure, and medium of instruction has encouraged a system where teachers rely heavily on teacher-dominated instructional methods that develop lower-order thinking skills (Verspoor, 2008).

The past three decades have therefore witnessed concerted efforts at curriculum revision and a shift from teacher-dominated classroom instructional methods to learner-centered pedagogy in social studies classrooms in Nigerian schools. This arose from the appreciation that the teacher-dominated pedagogy derived from the positivism-behaviorist philosophy of learning is not compatible with achieving the learning objectives of the social studies curriculum. Positivism suggests that teachers should ‘deliver’ a body of knowledge discovered and verified by scientists. The teacher’s task is to ‘transmit’ this authoritative knowledge to students, who ‘receive’ it with little critical reflection on how it came to be. Students are assessed on how well they have learned this pre-determined set of facts about the world, thereby placing the teacher at the center of the learning process: “If knowledge is to be transmitted by the teacher and received by the student, then the curriculum tends to be consistent with a teacher-centered model of instruction and a traditional system of assessment that aims at assessing recall of received knowledge” (du Plessis & Muzaffar, 2010).

The fundamental philosophy of learner-centered pedagogy differ in some respect from that of teacher-dominated pedagogy; learner-centered pedagogy draws on an alternative theory of knowledge known as constructivism. While not opposed to the scientific method as one approach to creating knowledge, constructivism assumes that knowledge emerges through interactions and experiences among learners and through reflection on the learner’s own ideas. In other words, knowledge is not external to the learner and awaiting discovery by him or her; rather, knowledge “is created through a process of new knowledge interacting with the prior knowledge and experiences of learners” (du Plessis & Muzaffar, 2010). Several eminent philosophers and educationists of the last century including John Dewey (1916), Jean Piaget (1955), and Lev Vygotsky (1967) have championed the adoption of the constructivist models and have demonstrated its relevance to pedagogy. Additionally, they consider knowledge as relevant for teachers and students when it is ‘in use’ rather than when it is ‘delivered’ in a way that dissociates it from previous experience and from the opportunity for engagement with it.

The need to implement the learner-centered pedagogy informed the policy implementation guidelines recommended by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS, 2000). These guidelines are summed up in the ‘Powerful Social Studies Teaching Model.’ The model consists of five principles which states that social studies teaching should be “meaningful, integrative, value-based, challenging and active.” Each of these principles “have direct implications for what teachers should know and be able to do and what dispositions they should possess.” (NCSS, 2000). The need to align social studies pedagogy in Nigerian schools with the ‘Powerful Social Studies Teaching Methods’ has been echoed by different investigators (Okoro, 2001; Fadeiye, 2005; Mkpa, 2005; Mbakwem, 2005, Bozimo & Ikwumelu, 2009). Moving away from traditional roles of the teacher as the main source of knowledge allows multiple and diverse perspectives to be introduced. Fullan and Langworthy (2014) claim that in the old pedagogy, a teachers’ performance was assessed primarily in terms of his or her ability to deliver content in their area of specialization. They also noted that in the new pedagogy, the foundation of teacher quality is a teachers’ pedagogical capacity, their repertoire of teaching strategies and their ability to form partnerships with students in mastering the learning process. Students learn that there are numerous sources and

strategies from which to acquire information. These learner-centered alternative strategies include: simulation method, debate, dramatization, discussion, demonstration, field trips/excursion, project method, role playing, activity method, problem solving and group work. Others include concept mapping, devil's advocate, guided inquiry, panel method, expository/presentation and creative activity. A common feature of most of these methods is that the learner is at the center of knowledge creation under the keen guidance and supervision of the teacher.

One of the goals of teaching social studies in Nigerian schools is the promotion of critical thinking skills in students, but social studies classrooms are being criticized for not achieving such goals because of the traditional teacher-centered pedagogy adopted in the teaching of the subject (Okpalama, 2008; Mkpa, 2001). As noted by Adeniji (2004) and re-echoed by others (Mkpa, 2005; Mezieobi, 1994), all teachers of social studies in all affected levels of education need to be familiar with the content and methods of teaching the subject in order to interpret the content of social studies correctly and encourage its learning. In addition, they need to acquire skills on selection and utilization of social studies methods. Mkpa (2005) reiterated that content must be related to selected instructional methods for effective and quality learning experiences to be achieved.

### **STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

There is growing and palpable concern among educationists, policy makers and other stakeholders in Nigeria regarding the ability of junior secondary school social studies curriculum as currently implemented to meet the lofty goals and ideals enunciated in the consensus document of the National Council on Social Studies. Some of the reasons for the apprehension include the persistent poor performance of students in the certificate examinations of the junior secondary school and the rising trend of social ills traceable to maladaptive social traits prevalent in the wider Nigerian society. Understanding reasons for these emerging and disturbing scenario is vital in the search for a better promotion of social studies in the Nigerian school system as well as the actualization of lofty goals of evolving an egalitarian society.

There has been an increase in school enrolment in Nigeria and other developing countries in the past few decades due to the adoption and implementation of the Education for All (EFA), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other educational initiatives in the past few decades in Nigeria and other developing countries of sub-Saharan Africa (Vavrus et al. 2011). Unfortunately, the increase in school enrolment has not been matched by equal investment in training and recruitment of professionally trained social studies teachers. This discrepancy has led to the appointment of teachers that read courses such as Geography, Economics, History, Government, English Language and even Fine Arts to teach social studies without due regard to the peculiar needs of the subject. This situation does not enhance the teaching and learning of social studies.

Added to the problem of inadequate number of social studies teachers in most junior secondary schools is the persistent adoption of the traditional teacher-centered positivism-behavioural pedagogy model where the teacher remains the 'source of all knowledge' and the learner a 'mere receiver' of knowledge. In this kind of environment, teachers are held accountable to teach a class that examines an enormous amount of social studies curriculum content to be learned in a single year. With little or no instructional resources to aid teaching except the textbook and the chalkboard, the social studies classroom become so boring and meaningless that little or no learning takes place. A number of investigators have attributed this poor learning environment partly to the teachers' inability to adopt learner-centered

constructivist pedagogy that makes the learner an agent of knowledge creation (Okpalama, 2008; Mkpa, 2001; Mezieobi, 1991). However, most of these studies are questionnaire-based relying on information provided by social studies teachers and students. It has been shown that what teachers report in questionnaire data may not be a true reflection of actual practices in the social studies classroom. In addition, it is important to recognize that within a large country such as Nigeria, there may be regional and state variations in educational investment and social studies curriculum implementation. There is limited research in the state of social studies classroom curriculum implementation and pedagogy in Edo State, Nigeria. This study have sought to address these weaknesses in the existing literature by examining the teaching methods utilized by social studies teachers in Edo State using both questionnaire data combined with direct classroom observation during social studies classroom instruction.

## **HYPOTHESES**

This study was guided by the following hypotheses.

1. The proportion of social studies teachers who reported use of the appropriate teaching methods to acceptable level based on questionnaire data will not be significantly different from 0.50 or 50%.
2. The proportion of social studies teachers who use the appropriate teaching methods to acceptable level during classroom teaching based on classroom observation data will not be significantly different from 0.50 or 50%.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employed descriptive survey design and observation of teachers. The sample population consists of one hundred and seventy three social studies teachers randomly selected from ten local government area of Edo state using multi-stage stratified sampling. These teachers responded to the questionnaire. Out of this number, 50 teachers were selected for observation. The questionnaire comprised of two sections; the first section contained items on teachers' personal data while the second section contained nine items on appropriate teaching suitable for teaching social studies students in social studies classrooms. It is a Likert-type rating scale with three levels on each item (Often=3, sometimes=2, not at all=1). The instrument for classroom observation was adapted from the second section of the questionnaire instrument with nine items; each of the items is also graded using the Likert-type rating scale with Often=3, sometimes=2 and not at all=1). The teachers were observed for twelve weeks at different occasions teaching social studies and types of teaching methods used in the classroom were rated.

To determine the acceptable level of reported use of the appropriate teaching methods, the number of options in the second section of the questionnaire and observation schedule and the number of items in each section was used. There were three options (often, sometimes, and not at all). The acceptable boundary is the exact boundary between "not at all" and "sometimes" which is 1.5. This number was used to multiply the number of items (nine in this case); therefore the acceptable (criterion) score for the instrument was 21.0.

The validity of the instrument was determined by two experts in Social Studies and one expert in measurement and evaluation. The reliability of the instrument was determined by pilot testing the questionnaire. Twenty five social studies teachers who were not involved in the main study were used. The data collected was analyzed using Cronbach Alpha technique and a reliability co-efficient of  $r = 0.78$  was obtained. Then, an observational schedule and rating scale developed for this purpose was used for classroom observation. Teaching methods used in social studies were itemized and rated. Various statistics including the Z-test

statistics was used to test hypotheses 1 and 2. All data were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

## RESULTS

The National Policy on Education (2013) prescribed that the junior secondary teachers should be holders of at least Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) in their teaching subjects. This defines the quality of teachers that are expected to teach various subjects in junior secondary schools. The policy also prescribed that students/teacher ratio should not exceed 40 students per teacher. Of the 173 teachers that participated in the questionnaire study, only 31 (18%) had professional training in social studies education either at the NCE or B.Ed level. The vast majority of the teachers (142 of the 173 teachers [82%]) had no professional training in social studies education. The student to teacher ratio was 174 students per teacher. This is significantly higher than the recommended ratio of 40 students to one teacher.

Similar to the findings in the questionnaire data, the direct observation data showed that lecture method (100%) and question and answer method (60%) were the most frequently used teaching methods in social studies classrooms while discussion method was used sometimes in 36 schools (72%) and often in three schools (6%). The other teaching methods including demonstration, simulation games, resource persons, debate, dramatization, field trips and projects methods were sparingly used. The same was true of role playing, activity method, problem solving and group work that were not used at all in most of the schools.

To establish the proportion of teachers using appropriate teaching methods to acceptable level, the following hypotheses were tested.

**Hypothesis 1: The proportion of social studies teachers who reported use of the appropriate teaching methods based on questionnaire data will not be significantly different from 0.50 or 50%.**

**Table 1. Proportion of social studies teachers with acceptable scores on the use of teaching methods (Teachers, n=173) based on questionnaire data**

Scores on Teaching Methods	N	Proportion	Criterion score	Z (cal)	Z (crit)	95% CI
Teachers with acceptable score	19					
Teachers with below acceptable scores	154	0.11	0.50	-10.27	±1.96	.06, .16
Total	173					

Of the 173 social studies teachers who participated in the questionnaire survey, the results showed that 19 teachers had acceptable score of 21.0 and above on the use of appropriate teaching methods while 158 teachers scored below 21.0 (Table 1). This gave a proportion of 0.11 (11%) of teachers who scored 21.0 and above. This figure is less than the criterion score of .50 (50%). The Z- calculated was found to -10.27 while the table Z-value was ±1.96. Since the calculated Z-value is greater than the table Z-value, the null hypothesis was rejected indicating that the proportion of social studies teachers with acceptable score on the use of the appropriate teaching methods was significantly different from 0.50 (50%).

**Hypothesis 2: The proportion of social studies teachers who use the appropriate teaching methods during classroom teaching based on classroom observation data will not be significantly different from 0.50 or 50%.**



**Table 2. Proportion of social studies teachers with acceptable scores on the use of teaching methods during classroom teaching based on classroom observation data (Teachers, n=50)**

<i>Scores on Teaching Methods</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Proportion</i>	<i>Criterion score</i>	<i>Z (cal)</i>	<i>Z (crit)</i>	<i>95% CI</i>
Teachers with acceptable score	9					
Teachers with below acceptable scores	41	0.18	0.50	-3.52	±1.96	.12, .26
Total	50					

Hypothesis 2 sought to evaluate if the proportion of teachers who actually utilized the appropriate teaching methods during actual classroom teaching was significantly different from 0.50 (50%). This hypothesis was tested using data obtained by direct observation of teachers’ use of the appropriate teaching methods during actual classroom teaching. Of the 50 teachers that participated in the observation study, nine teachers (18%) achieved up to the accepted score of 21.0. This figure of 18% was found to be significantly different from the criterion score of 50% (Table 2). The calculated Z-score was found to be -3.52 which is numerically greater than the Table Z-score of 1.96. The null-hypothesis was rejected, indicating that the proportion of teachers using the appropriate teaching methods was significantly different from 0.50 (50%).

**DISCUSSION**

Teachers have a key role to play in helping children to develop the knowledge and skills necessary for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Certainly, learning is affected by a student’s ability and attitude as well as resources in the child’s school and home. However, teacher quality has been shown to be the “single most important school variable influencing student achievement” (Verspoor, 2008). Teachers’ qualifications, experience, knowledge of subject areas, and pedagogical skills influence student learning in profound ways. Improving the quality of instruction depends to a large extent on the pedagogical training and support provided to teachers before they begin their teaching careers and throughout the years they are in the classroom.

This study sought to examine the teaching methods utilized by social studies teachers during classroom instruction in junior secondary schools in Edo State, Nigeria. The results of the study revealed gross inadequacy in the availability and quality of trained professional social studies teachers in junior secondary schools in Edo State of Nigeria. A student to teacher ratio of 174 students to one teacher as opposed to the recommended ratio of 40 students to one teacher reflects the enormity of the shortage. In addition, only a small proportion of the available teachers (31 out of 173) are professionally trained in social studies education. The above scenario represents a major setback in the implementation of the junior secondary school social studies curriculum in Edo State, Nigeria. This is partly explained by the precipitous decline in government expenditure for education and investment in teacher education programs in Nigeria and most of other sub-Saharan African countries.

The results also showed that significantly less proportion of social studies teachers (0.11) adopted the prescribed teaching methods during classroom instruction. In both the questionnaire and direct observation data, the mean scores of teachers on the use of prescribed teaching methods were significantly less than the criterion scores. These findings re-echo the reports of other investigators drawn from different population groups in both developing and developed countries. In an evaluation of the utilization of prescribed social studies instructional methods in Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria, Anadi et al. (2008) found

that teachers do not effectively utilize the prescribed social studies teaching methods. Similarly, Mbakwem (2008) reported the traditional teacher-dominated lecture technique as the dominant method utilized by social studies teachers in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. Similar findings were reported by Ogunsanya (2001) among social studies students drawn from 15 selected public schools in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. Among teachers and students in middle schools in Turkey, Yildirim (2006) found that lecturing was the reported dominant method of social studies classroom instruction with group activity and discussion methods reportedly used sometimes or rarely.

After reviewing the first 14 years of research on Social Studies in Africa, Merryfield&Mutebi (1991) concluded that Social Studies teachers use the same expository teacher-centered methods in the classrooms and there was no evidence of inquiry methods. According to them this characteristics were commonly found among history and geography teachers. Mezieobi (1992) expressed that the current practice whereby Social Studies teachers rely on the didactic and expository methods in their Social Studies instruction does not augur well for Social Studies implementation. Given the nature of Social Studies and in order to accomplish its aims, he advised that professional Social Studies teachers should utilize in their interactive process, methods such as simulation games, inquiry, problem solving, discovering, role playing, which are indispensable for the successful implementation of the Social Studies curriculum.

In keeping with its 'Powerful Social Studies Teaching Model', the National Council on Social Studies (2000) recommended the following methods for effective social studies teaching: guided inquiry, dramatization, creative activity, project method, debate, field trip, problem-solving, group work, role play, discussion, questioning, simulation games, brainstorming and use of resource persons. These methods have some important features in common. They all draw in varying degrees from the learner-centered constructivist pedagogy model of Dewey (1916), Piaget (1955) and Vygotsky (1967). They place the learner at the center of the social studies teaching and learning. Various studies have shown that these methods are superior to the teacher-dominated behaviorist instructional model that rely on lectures, textbooks, assignments and traditional tests. Of all learner-centered teaching methods, the inquiry, project and problem-based methods have been most widely recommended for social studies classroom instruction. In the inquiry method, learners are engaged in investigating real world issues with a broad thematic framework under the guidance of the teacher. It emphasizes students' involvement in observing and probing events, issues and phenomena specified by the curriculum. Several investigators have reported that teaching using the guided inquiry method results in increased understanding of curriculum concepts, improvement in academic achievement and more utilization of critical thinking. Among Junior Secondary School III (JSS III) students in selected schools in Anambra State, Nigeria, Olibie and Ezeoba (2014) reported that the guided-inquiry method is more effective in raising students' achievement in selected concepts in social studies curriculum more than the lecture method irrespective of students' ability and school location. Similar findings were reported by Edinyang and Ubi (2012) and Olukayode (2012) in social studies classrooms in Akwa Ibom and Ogun States of Nigeria, respectively. Studies from outside Nigeria including Kane (2013), Duncan& Arthurs (2012), Gautreau&Binns (2012) and Friesen & Scott (2013) have also reported similar findings.

The project method is believed to be derived from the educational ideal of John Dewey (1916). He believes that education should fit the child rightly into his present society rather than prepare him/her for the future which is unknown (Mkpa, 2009). The project method involves doing something concrete and practical "something which is motivated, generated and directed by the student himself". Several studies have verified the impact of project-

based approaches on students' learning. The American Schools Development Corp (1997) reported that nine out of 10 schools that implemented expeditionary learning models (a project-based approach) demonstrated improvement among their students in standardized tests reflecting academic achievements. In another study examining Grades 4 and 5 students working on a nine-week project to define and find solutions related to housing shortages in the United States, Shephard (1998) found that the project-learning students scored significantly higher on a critical-thinking test in comparison to a control group who did not take part in the inquiry project. The project-learning students also demonstrated greater confidence in their learning.

Of all the approaches to inquiry, problem-based learning is the most researched. According to Barron and Darling-Hammond (2008), problem-based learning involves students working in small groups to “explore meaningful problems, identifying what they need to know in order to solve the problem, and coming up with strategies for solutions”. Barrows (1996) argued that its core characteristics include a student-centered approach to learning, and learning that occurs in small groups under the guidance of a teacher who acts as a facilitator or guide. In a meta-analysis study, Dochy et al. (2003) examined 43 peer-reviewed empirical studies on problem-based learning undertaken in classrooms. They found that problem-based learning has a strong positive effect on students' skills. Barron and Darling-Hammond (2008) documented a number of studies that suggest that this approach is effective “in supporting flexible problem-solving, reasoning skills, and generating accurate hypotheses and coherent explanations”. Similarly, studies have also documented the advantages of other learner-centred instructional methods over the current teacher-dominated teaching techniques currently seen in most of the junior secondary schools in Nigeria (Ikwumelu, 2002; Fadeiye, 2005; Mkpa, 2009; Onyibe, 2014).

In conclusion, it is important to emphasize the need for social studies teachers to heed the advice of experts as the Nigerian educational system evolve strategies for meeting the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. According to Mezieobi (1994), social studies learning require the utilization of a wide range of teaching techniques if the varying learning interests and capacities of the heterogeneous class of students are to be maximally taken care of. The best method according to him is the one that best satisfies the objectives and content of a lesson or lesson unit. Social studies teachers must understand not only the specialized content that they teach, but must also understand the organizing features, and the ways in which knowledge is created. Knowledgeable teachers not only have well developed conceptual knowledge, but are also students of their own teaching, and thus enable those in their custody to become students themselves. Excellent teaching requires a combination of knowledge and skills.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In the light of the above observations, a critical review and overhaul of the current teaching methods used in social studies classroom in the junior secondary schools in Edo State is warranted. It is therefore recommended that: (i) Opportunities for professional development for teacher educators in universities and other teacher education institutions should be provided through establishment of professional learning communities and professional outreach to local secondary and primary schools in developing locally-relevant methods for promoting learner-centered pedagogy. This should be done in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and other key stakeholders. (ii) Strengthening of the existing teacher education programs in the areas of curriculum and methods of instruction by redesigning content and educational foundation courses with emphasis on pedagogical content knowledge. (iii) Restructuring the timetable in teacher education institutions to allow more structured opportunities for teaching practice using learner-centered pedagogy and integrating learner-



centered pedagogy into the curriculum across all subjects. (iv) Strengthening social studies teachers' skills in learner-centered pedagogy through formation of sustainable teacher learning communities (TLC) within each local government area. This has been shown to help teachers make the necessary changes in their teaching methods at their own pace and schedule. (v) Training and recruitment of more professional social studies teachers in the junior secondary schools in Edo State.

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