



A PERISCOPE INTO LEARNING DIFFICULTIES IN UPPER BASIC SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM IN ABEOKUTA SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, OGUN STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated learning difficulties of students in Social Studies' Upper Basic Curriculum in Abeokuta South Local Government Area of Ogun state, Nigeria. Using a descriptive survey of correlational type design, percentage calculations and chi-square statistics, among a sample of 500 Junior Secondary School students in the local government, it was discovered that three topics namely: National Economy, World Global Cooperation and World Transportation systems were identified as difficult to learn by majority of the students. The reasons given by the students for the difficulties were the abstract nature of some social studies topics, lack of textbooks, students' truancy and absentism. It was also found that more female students (57.95%) found the three identified topics more difficult than their male counterparts (42.05%) significant at 0.05 level. It was therefore recommended that Social Studies Teachers need to be more exposed to innovative methods of teaching their subject in order to simplify what the students considered as the abstract and broad nature of the subject. In addition, Adequate instructional resources and relevant textbooks were also recommended to be used. Parents were also encouraged to frequently monitor the attendance of their children in schools and classes.

Keywords: Periscope, Learning Difficulties, Upper Basic Social Studies Curriculum.

Introduction

As a dynamic subject, Social Studies is examined the transformational nature of man's problems in society. The flexibility in the focus of social studies according to Jekayinfa (2014), is to deal with problems concerning human beings, their institutions, environments and relationships. In line with this position, the author noted the Comparative Education Study and Adaption Centre (CESAC) position that Social Studies is concerned with the way man lives in and interacts with his/her social and physical environments and how science and technology help him/her to adequately adapt to the environments. To this end, Ogunyemi (2014) submitted that social studies is the dynamic interaction people have with themselves

and elements of their environments. From General Education perspective, Lester (1970) as quoted by Adetoro (2015) sees social studies as the portion of general education curriculum of which purpose is to make students more rational with regard to human behavior and social interaction.

Ogunyemi (2014) noted that Social Studies had suffered identity crisis in Nigeria which had led to changes in its nomenclature overtime. According to the author it had moved from civics studies to elementary social sciences, later from citizenship education to civic education and now national values. The national values conception is even seen as a conspiracy of “curriculum politics” by academic contractors (Ogunyemi, 2014). Thus, in calling for ‘Back-to-Basic-curriculum’, Ross (2014) submitted that there is the need for a ‘New Social Studies’ that would transform and reconstruct the society desirably.

As a multi-disciplinary studies of humanities and social sciences, the problem of curriculum refinement in Social Studies is about tackling the daily-value degeneration in the society (Wahab, 2022), progressive learning to support civic life (Lawal, 2022), promoting Sustainable Development Goals (Adeyemi, 2022), promoting nation-building through tolerant political culture (Arisi, 2022), regenerating our good cultural values and gender sensitivity (Onifade, 2023) as well as socializing the child effectively before civilizing him or her (Yusuf, 2023). Social Studies as being presently taught in Nigeria suggests that some topics in the subject appear difficult to teach due to their abstract nature, diverse scope and controversies they generate (Abu-Hamdan, 2014; Okunloye, Olokooba, Abdulsalam, 2016). Even Omiyefa and Lijadu (2014) noted that due to the multi-dynamic nature of human problems, delineating the contents of social studies properly and organizing them to satisfy the factors of relevance and functionality may not be so easy. Indeed, most of the Social Studies researchers in Nigeria have attested to the paucity of relevant textbooks coupled with the need for better curricular integration in social studies (Mezieobi, Nzokuru & Mezieobi, 2015). However as well remarked by Awoyemi in Adetoro (2015) and Lawal (2022), the dilemma of producing relevant and functional Social Studies curriculum is that what seems to be relevant in the past would not necessarily be fashionable today and what is relevant today may not be in the nearest future. This therefore calls for the need to adjust to the thought patterns of the learners, their attitudes and beliefs, interests and values as well as the type of society that exists and the predominant human trend in it to aid and enrich content selection in social studies (Lawal, 2022 & Adetoro, 2015).



Objectives of the Study

This study aimed at identifying social studies difficult topics as perceived by the students in the Upper Basic Curriculum in Abeokuta South Local Government Area, Ogun State, Nigeria. It also aimed at finding the rank of each perceived difficulty level of the topics. The study also attempted to find out the influence of gender to the difficulty level as perceived by the students in Abeokuta South Local Government Area, Ogun State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

- What are the students' perceived difficult topics in Upper Basic Social Studies curriculum in Abeokuta South Local Government Area, Ogun State?
- What reasons did students give for the perceived difficult topics in social studies?
- Does gender account for the perceived difficult topics in social studies?

Hypothesis

There is no significant influence of gender in students perceived difficult topics in the upper basic Social Studies curriculum.

Literature Review

Social Studies in Nigeria for long has been regarded as an integration of humanities and Social Sciences (Yusuf, Agbonna & Onifade, 2010). However, developments in the last two decades in the society and the global level demands that its scope should be widened to cover solutions to multifaceted human problems. Thus, according to Ogunyemi (2014), the initial efforts in Nigeria proved challenging because of the level of difficulty of its nature and scope to switch from the British conservative model of teaching civics, geography and history to 'American spirit of adventurism and experimentation of solving man's numerous societal problems.'

Consequently, this initial confusion and its newness led to the subject being taught by specialist in humanities and the social sciences without relevant pedagogical background, which Iyamu (2016) ascribe to inadequate Teacher preparation. This initial 'content-based' model of teaching social studies was later substituted for 'integrated and issues-based' model to bring better 'reflective inquiry spirit' and 'citizenship transmission' in learning.

The 'content-based' approach model makes the subject to look more "abstract and difficult" to learners while the integrated and issues-based approach make learning wholistic and

interconnected (Adetoro, 2018). In his studies, Gunawan (2019) discovered that teaching experience affects the ability of Teachers to apply learning innovations. The author further observed that students submitted that the curriculum content was too much, blurry, unfocused and unorganized, making it difficult for teachers to provide social studies materials with certainty. This is to state that teaching social studies effectively requires sequential integration and reflective analysis (Sathiya & Premalatha, 2023; Okunloye, Olokooba & Abdulsalam, 2019).

Looking at the students' attitude towards the learning Social Studies, Hamsberry and Moroz (2001) as reported by Dhakal (2022) indicated a negative one among the Australian students. This is contrary to the positive interest of students in the United States and Nepal (Dhakal, 2022). Adetoro (2018) also discovered that there are some controversial and sensitive issues in social studies such as cultural patterns, social norms, religious beliefs, ethnicity that majority of the teachers found difficult to teach in the class because of their own perceived cultural differences systems, religious beliefs and ethnic backgrounds. According to the researcher, most Social Studies teachers either deny taking a perspective, teach towards a particular perspective or avoid discussing the topic, with only a few balancing different perspectives on the issues. This is why in ranking by Okunloye, Olokooba and Abdulsalam (2019), the teacher factor came first, followed by the students' factor and third is the subject factor among the contributory factors that serve as obstacles to successful learning of Social Studies in the classroom.

The role of gender in studies for addressing social inequalities, diverse perspectives and human feelings need to be acknowledged. However, various findings on the role of gender factor in the perception of Social Studies curriculum seem inconsistent. Thus, the studies by Sathiya and Premalatha (2023) showed that there was no significant difference in the learning difficulties of both male and female students in social studies, even though the males had higher mean scores than the females. On the other hand, the studies of Mezieobi, Oyeoku and Igbo-Janeth (2012) found no gender-bias in social studies curriculum acceptability in Nigerian universities. This therefore calls for the need to constantly examine the thought patterns of different categories of learners, their attitudes, beliefs and values on the current Social Studies curriculum (Lawal, 2022).



Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design of correlational type, using questionnaires to gather information from the selected respondents. Out of a total of twelve (12) Junior Public Secondary Schools in Abeokuta South Local Government, seven (7) of them were randomly selected for the study. The Upper Basic III classes of the seven schools were also the classes for the study. Using a multi-stage, cluster and stratified sampling method, out of a total of 3,010 girls and 2,460 boys in the classes, 282 girls and 218 boys were proportionally selected as the sample size (representing 10.94 percents of the total population). The instrument for the study was a self-designed questionnaire format that covers all the twenty-two thematic areas of the Upper Basic level Social Studies curriculum. The questionnaire format has three sections namely; A, B and C respectively. Section A sought to know the personal data of the sampled students where their gender type was to be reflected. Section B was based on 4-scale options from Very Difficult, Difficult, Not Difficult, Very Simple which sought to know the respondents' choice of difficulty level of the social studies topics. Section C was also on a 4-scale from Strongly Agreed, Agreed, Disagreed, to Strongly Disagreed option and sought to know the reasons for the difficulty perceptions of the students. The questionnaire items were given face and content validity by three social studies experts from Federal College of Education, Abeokuta while the reliability test of test-retest yielded an index of 0.67. The 500 questionnaires were administered with the support of three-trained social studies Teachers on the field in the seven sampled schools. Simple percentages, ranking and chi-square were used for data analysis.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Difficult Topics in Social Studies as Perceived by the JSS3 students

S/N	Topics	VD	D	ND	VS	Rank
1	Meaning/Definition of Social Studies	14 (3.1)	28 (5.4)	36 (8.1)	372 (83.4)	21st
2	Scope of Social Studies	28 (5.6)	56 (11.2)	144 (28.8)	272 (54.4)	15th
3	Nature of Social Studies	80 (16.2)	46 (9.3)	132 (26.7)	236 (47.8)	5th
4	Physical environment	22 (4.4)	40 (8.0)	120 (24.1)	316 (63.5)	17th
5	Social environment	14 (2.8)	20 (4.0)	142 (28.6)	320 (64.5)	22nd
6	Socialization	34 (6.9)	42 (8.5)	132 (26.7)	286 (57.9)	14th
7	Culture	20 (4.0)	24 (4.8)	82 (16.5)	370 (74.6)	20th
8	Social problem e.g cultism, drug abuse, poverty, corruption etc.	48 (9.7)	66 (13.4)	116 (23.5)	264 (53.4)	6th
9	National Unity and Integration	48 (9.7)	82 (16.7)	172 (35.0)	190 (38.6)	4th
10	Group Behaviour	50 (10.0)	40 (8.0)	134 (26.9)	274 (55.0)	10th
11	Science and Technology	38 (7.4)	52 (10.1)	158 (30.7)	266 (51.8)	10th
12	Religion	22 (4.5)	40 (8.2)	100 (20.4)	328 (66.9)	17th
13	School Community	30 (6.2)	40 (8.2)	136 (28.0)	280 (57.0)	16th
14	Home appliances	46 (9.6)	36 (7.5)	112 (23.4)	284 (59.4)	12th
15	Storage	42 (8.6)	38 (7.8)	108 (22.1)	300 (59.2)	13th
16	National economy of banks, privatization economics, diversification insurance, corporation, stock exchange	216 (43.4)	96 (19.3)	82 (16.5)	104 (20.9)	1st
17	Saving and Ways of Savings	30 (6.0)	66 (13.2)	108 (21.6)	296 (59.2)	8th
18	World Transportation System	50 (10.2)	203 (41.6)	124 (25.4)	111 (22.7)	3rd
19	Health issues e.g AIDS, sources of water, harmful substances etc	42 (8.5)	52 (10.5)	172 (34.8)	228 (46.2)	9th
20	Social value e.g family life education, population, human trafficking etc	40 (8.2)	58 (11.9)	126 (25.8)	264 (54.1)	7th
21	Peace and conflicts	18 (3.7)	44 (9.1)	78 (16.1)	344 (71.1)	17th
22	World global cooperation	133 (26.9)	126 (25.5)	146 (29.6)	89 (18.0)	2nd

Key: VD = Very Difficult, D = Difficult, ND = Not Difficult, VS = Very Simple



In table 1 (putting the percentages responses on very difficult and difficult together), the perceived difficult topics according to the sampled students from the twenty (20) junior secondary schools are “National Economy e.g bank, privatization, economic diversification, insurance corporation and stock exchange” which ranked 1st, World Global Cooperation” which ranked 2nd and “world transportation system” which ranked 3rd. National unity and integration was ranked 4th while nature of Social Studies was ranked 5th and Social problems were ranked 7th respectively. Other topics have varied least difficulty perception levels like meaning of social studies (ranked 21st), scope of social studies (ranked 15th), physical environment (ranked 17th), social environment (22nd), socialization (ranked 14th), culture (ranked 20th), social problems (ranked 6th), group behavior, Science and Technology (ranked 10th respectively), Home Appliances (ranked 12th), religion, Physical Environment, Peace and Conflicts (ranked 17th respectively), storage (ranked 13th), health issues (ranked 9th) and School Community (ranked 16th). Consequently, learning national economy, global transportation and world transportation appear abstract to the students in line with the observations of Abu-Hamdan (2014); Okunloye, Olokooba and Abdulsalam (2016) who discovered similar trends in their research findings.

Table 2: Perceived Reasons for Social Studies topics Difficulty

S/N	Reasons for difficulty	SA	A	D	SD
1	Abstract nature of social studies topics	64 (13.1)	250 (51.0)	70 (14.3)	106 (21.66)
2	Wide nature of social studies	88 (17.8)	188 (38.1)	130 (26.3)	88 (17.8)
3	Controversial nature of some social studies topics	66 (13.4)	194 (39.3)	118 (23.9)	116 (23.4)
4	Teachers' poor teaching methods	52 (10.7)	120 (24.7)	150 (30.9)	164 (23.4)
5	Teachers' poor explanation	68 (13.9)	106 (21.6)	164 (33.5)	152 (31.0)
6	Teachers' inadequate use of instructional materials	54 (11.6)	148 (31.8)	136 (29.2)	128 (27.5)
7	Teachers' poor content knowledge	68 (14.0)	102 (21.0)	146 (30.0)	170 (35.0)
8	Teachers' inadequate motivation	54 (11.2)	148 (30.6)	136 (28.1)	146 (30.2)
9	Teachers' poor communication	70 (14.3)	134 (27.5)	126 (25.9)	158 (32.4)
10	Shortage of qualified teachers	76 (15.6)	144 (29.5)	102 (20.9)	166 (34.0)
11	Students' lack of interest in social studies	82 (16.7)	158 (32.1)	120 (24.4)	132 (27.8)
12	Students' poor reading habits	102 (20.8)	148 (30.2)	104 (21.2)	136 (27.8)
13	Students' lack of textbooks	100	174	116	98

		(20.5)	(35.7)	(23.8)	(20.1)
14	Students' truancy and absenteeism	76 (16.4)	184 (39.7)	122 (26.3)	82 (17.7)
15	Students' lack of concentration in the class	86 (18.5)	164 (35.2)	110 (23.6)	106 (22.7)
16	Students' hatred for social studies teacher	72 (16.1)	136 (30.4)	152 (33.9)	88 (19.6)
17	Scarcity of social studies textbooks	66 (14.2)	152 (32.6)	132 (28.3)	116 (24.9)
18	Abstract nature of social studies textbooks	58 (11.1)	156 (29.9)	144 (27.6)	164 (31.4)
19	Inadequate illustrations in social studies textbooks	74 (16.1)	144 (31.3)	90 (19.6)	152 (33.0)
20	Parental inadequate support for students	92 (21.0)	138 (31.5)	82 (18.7)	126 (28.8)
21	Parents do not provide conducive environment for reading at home	76 (14.3)	150 (28.2)	136 (25.6)	170 (32.0)
22	Rush for syllabus coverage	72 (15.5)	142 (30.5)	106 (22.7)	146 (31.3)
23	Frequently disrupted school periods	66 (14.0)	104 (22.0)	150 (31.8)	152 (32.2)
24	Inadequate extra-moral lesson	74 (15.6)	132 (27.8)	120 (25.3)	148 (31.3)
25	Large class size	76 (16.7)	130 (28.5)	152 (33.3)	98 (21.5)
26	Poor future career for social studies	70 (14.6)	106 (22.2)	146 (30.5)	156 (32.6)
27	Government lack of support for social studies	72 (15.1)	100 (23.0)	144 (23.8)	182 (38.1)

Key: VD = Very Difficult, D = Difficult, ND = Not Difficult, VS = Very Simple

In table 2 (using addition of strongly Agree and Agree options) the abstract nature of social studies was opined first as the reason for the identified difficult topics with 64.1% responses in agreement, second was the students' lack of textbooks with 56.2% agreement responses, third was students truancy and absenteeism with 56.1% agreement responses, fourth was the wide nature of social studies with 55.9%, fifth was the students lack of concentration in the class with 53.7% agreement, sixth was the controversial nature of some social studies topics with 52.7% agreement, seventh was parental inadequate support for students with 52.5% agreement responses and eight was students poor reading habits with 51.0% agreement responses. Thus, the abstract nature of some topics and the paucity of relevant social studies textbooks were observed by the students as making the learning of social studies difficult for them. This is in line with the discovery of Okunloye et al (2016); Mezieobi, Nzokuru and Mezieobi (2016) who found abstract nature of some topics in social studies and inadequate relevant textbooks to be part of the problems affecting learning of social studies by the students.



Table 3: Gender Factor in JSS3 Students' Perception of Difficult Topics in Social Studies

S/N	Topics	VD		D		ND		VS	
		M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1	National Economy e.g Banks, Privatization, economic diversification, insurance corporation, stock exchange	98 (45.4)	118 (54.6)	41 (38.7)	65 (61.3)	30 (36.6)	52 (63.4)	49 (52.1)	45 (47.9)
2	World Transportation System	21 (35.0)	39 (65.0)	46 (27.1)	124 (72.9)	96 (77.4)	28 (22.6)	55 (41.0)	79 (59.0)
3	World Global Cooperation	47 (35.3)	86 (64.7)	59 (46.8)	67 (53.2)	69 (47.3)	77 (52.7)	43 (48.3)	46 (51.7)
	Total	166 (40.6)	243 (59.4)	146 (36.3)	256 (63.7)	195 (55.4)	157 (44.6)	147 (46.4)	170 (53.6)

Key: VD = Very Difficult, D = Difficult, ND = Not Difficult, VS = Very Simple, M = Male, F = Female.

In Table 3 and finding the average of VD plus D combined together, 42.05% of the male students agreed that the topic 'National Economy' was difficult as against 57.95% of their female counterparts who agreed so. Furthermore, while 31.05% male students agreed that the topic 'World Transportation System' is difficult, it was 68.95% of the female students that agreed on this point. In addition, while 41.05% of the male students agreed that 'World/ Global Cooperation' is difficult to understand as a social studies topic, 58.95% of their female counterparts agreed also to this claim.

Therefore, the three identified difficult topics in social studies (National Economy, World Transportation System and World/ Global Cooperation) were more difficult for the female students (61.55%) than their male counterparts (38.45%). These findings mean that the teachers need to be more skillful and resourceful in teaching the topics.

Table 4: Chis-square (X^2) of Gender Factor in JSS3 Students Perception of Difficult Topics in Social Studies

Gender	VD	D	ND	VS	Total
Male	166 (180.73)	146 (177.64)	195 (155.55)	147 (140.08)	654
Female	243 (228.27)	256 (224.36)	157 (196.45)	170 (176.92)	826

$$X^2 = 30.79_{cal} > 9.49_{tab} @ 0.005 \text{ level of significance.}$$

Result from Table 4 indicates a significant difference in gender perceptions of the difficult topics in JSS3 social studies in the local government. This is because the calculated value of chi-square (X^2) of 30.79 is greater than the table value of 9.49 at 0.005 level of significance. Corroborating the descriptive (percentages) result in Table 3 therefore, more female students

of JSS3 perceived the three topics in Social Studies (National Economy, World Transportation System and World/ Global Cooperation) more difficult for them to understand than their male counterparts. Consequently therefore, skills in gender sensitivity are more required in social studies teaching. This finding is in line with the findings of Adetoro (2018) and Sathiya and Premalatha (2023) that the difficulty level of social studies contents as perceived by students among other factors like locality and medium of instruction includes gender factor.

Conclusion

From the findings of this study, students at the upper basic level perceived some topics in social studies curriculum as difficult to learn. By ranking, the three foremost topics found to be difficult to learn include national economy involving privatization, diversification, insurance and stock exchange; world transportation systems and global economy. Others include national unity and integration; nature of social studies, social problems, social values, health issues etc. Students' related factors such as truancy, absenteeism and lack of text books, parental inadequate supports were also found to be contributory factors to the difficulties that some of the students faced in learning social studies as equally established by Okunloye et al (2019) and Dhakal (2022). Furthermore, a significant difference was found between the perceptions of male and female students on topic difficulties in social studies. All these findings pointed to the need for continuous researches in learning and teaching of social studies in secondary schools.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. There is the need for continuous exposure of social studies Teachers to innovative methods of teaching the subject through constant workshops and seminars.
2. Nigerian Social Studies Teachers need to be more trained in special skills of being resourceful in teaching abstract topics and gender sensitivity and balancing.
3. Teachers must make constant use of relevant good audio-visual interactive teaching materials in teaching the subject.
4. Adequate community resources need to be provided to make learning of Social Studies concepts easier in the schools.
5. Government must provide opportunities for field trips, good classrooms and adequate learning resources for the teaching of social studies.



6. Relevant social studies textbooks are needed in school libraries and provided by parents for their children at home to support effective learning of social studies. Consequently, experts in social studies must be commissioned by governments to write relevant textbooks for social studies.
7. School authorities and teachers should ensure adequate monitoring of students and report their absenteeism regularly to their parents or guardians.

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