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The Attitude of Students towards the Learning of Social Studies and Their Performance: The Case of Accra Metropolitan Assembly in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana

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Abstract:

This study sought to examine students' attitude towards learning of Social Studies and their performance in the Accra Metropolitan Assembly in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. A sample of seventy-two (72) teachers was used. Methodologically, the study adopted the simple random sampling technique and purposive sampling technique. Questionnaires were used as the main data collection instrument. Kohler's theory of insight learning served as the theoretical basis for this study. The quantitative data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0. whereas the qualitative data was transcribed appropriately. It was found that students in the Accra Metropolitan Assembly performed averagely in Social Studies. They also have positive attitudes towards studying Social Studies. It is therefore recommended that Ghana Education Service should recruit professional teachers to teach Social Studies in Senior High schools. This will help the students to improve more with the right knowledge in Social Studies.

Keywords: Attitude, students, learning, social studies, performance, kohler's theory, insight learning

1. Introduction

The overall goal of the Ministry of Education is to provide relevant and quality education for all Ghanaians, including the disadvantaged, to enable them acquire skills which will make them functionally literate and productive. This helps to facilitate poverty alleviation and promote the rapid socio-economic growth of the country (Ministry of Education, 2012). Preparing students for the 21st century cannot be accomplished without a strong and sustaining emphasis on Social Studies (Ministry of Education, 2012). Social Studies provide the skills that are the key to opening doors for a more diverse, competitive workforce and responsible citizenry. Students use critical thinking, self-assessment, reasoning, problem-solving, collaboration, research and investigation to make connections in new and innovative ways as they progress through Social Studies education. These standards outline the knowledge and skills needed to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world (Shulman, 1986).

The National Council for Social Studies divides Social Studies objectives into four categories: knowledge, skills, values, and participation (Barr, 1977). These four categories of the learning of Social Studies are also addressed in the objectives declared by the Ghana Education Service for both elementary schools and senior high schools (Ghana Education Service, 2007). Each of these categories provide the basis of curriculum development for senior high schools in Ghana. Ghana's Ministry of Education state that Social Studies at the senior high school level is concerned with equipping the students with an integrated body of knowledge, skills and attitudes that will help the student develop a broader perspective of Ghana and the world. The subject probes the past and provides knowledge for the students to understand his or her society and be able to solve personal and societal problems. The subject has been divided into three sections each of which focus on the environment, government and stability, social and economic development (Ministry of Education, 2007).

Social Studies curriculum is based on key concepts such as democracy, justice, rights and responsibilities, identity and diversity. Teachers use topical, political and social issues to bring the Social Studies content to life. These content areas develop in students' key citizenship skills needed for research, discussion as well as debate sessions (Bining & Bining, 1952). The Social Studies curriculum used in senior high schools aims at developing in students the ability to participate in their communities meaningfully and wider societies as informed citizens (Ministry of Education, 2007). The purpose of active citizens is to teach students to work together and take practical actions using their knowledge and understanding in Social Studies to contribute to the better society locally, nationally and globally (Bath, 1983). For example, after learning about human rights, diversity and inequality, students might decide to set up a project to address racism in their school or local community.

The advancement of 'liberty and justice for all' as envisioned by our country's founders requires that, citizens have to acquire knowledge, attitudes and values to guard and endorse the principles of constitutional democracy (Constitution of Ghana, 1992). The success of Ghana's growth and stability relies strongly on its educational system. Social Studies is a

major part of the school's curriculum because it explores morals, values and provides students with the ability to understand the values associated with being a good citizen (Ministry of Education, 2007). It is against this background that this study sought to examine students' attitudes towards the learning of Social Studies and their performance in senior high schools.

1.1. Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to find out the attitude of students towards the learning of Social Studies and their performance in the Accra Metropolitan Assembly.

1.2. Research Question

What is the attitude of students toward learning of Social Studies and their performance in the Accra Metropolitan Assembly

1.3. Significance of the Study

The findings of the study are expected to be particularly relevant to educational policy and decision makers responsible for the development and improvement of the teaching of Social Studies in Senior High schools. It is also expected that the research will bring to light how Social Studies students perform in the subject. It would also help identify the students' attitude towards the subject and its effect on their performance.

1.4. Delimitation of the Study

The study was delimited to teachers who teach Social Studies in Senior High Schools and the students in the Accra Metropolitan Assembly in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. The researcher is, however, hopeful that since Senior High School teachers have similar characteristics in terms of training, the result of the study could be used as a basis for generalization in the teaching and learning of Social Studies in Senior High Schools.

1.5. Limitations of the Study

Some of the problems that evolved were lack of easy accessibility to schools and retrieval of questionnaires. Also, some of the respondents did not provide clear responses. Some teachers also felt reluctant to answer the questionnaires. It was also difficult meeting with respondents because of their tight instructional hours.

2. Literature Review

The chapter presents a summary of the related empirical literature reviewed and the theoretical underpinning of the current study.

2.1. Brief Historical Overview of Social Studies as a Subject

Tamakloe (1994) looks at Social Studies as a subject that deals with man and his relationship to his environment. This goes to explain the fact that teaching of Social Studies should aim at exposing learners to the way of life of the society and the realization that humans, plants and all the other animals are dependent upon each other.

The field of Social Studies was developed in the early years of the 20th century in the United States of America. It was built on the foundations of history which was recognized as the central study of Social Studies. The change from the traditional subjects of History to Social Studies occurred in the Jones report (Ravitch, 2003) on Social Studies; incorporated into the famous Cardinal Principle report of the National Education Association in 1918 which suggested that the goal of Social Studies was good citizenship and that historical studies that did not contribute to social change had no value. This report gave a strong boost to Social Studies teaching. The study of history was considered too 'academic' and far removed from students' immediate needs and that they made no contributions to social efficiency. It was in the field of social efficiency that Social Studies was born. The idea was to teach students facts and skills that were relevant to the institutions of their own society and also to prepare them for the real world that would confront them when they had left school. By the 1930s, the Social Studies programme had displaced history with its expanding environment concepts that is, the home, neighbourhood and community (Ravitch, 2003). Social Studies was therefore intended to provide an integrative education aimed at training students as decision makers.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

2.2.1. The Concept of Learning

The phenomenon of learning is so varied and diverse that its inclusion in eight single categories may not be warranted. Learning is a concept and not a 'thing'. The activity of learning is inferred only through behavioural symptoms. Kimble (1962) attempted to define learning as a relatively permanent change in behavioural potential that occurs as a result of reinforced practice. This definition postulates that the change needs not be an improvement. Addictions and prejudices are learned as well as high-level skills and useful knowledge. The psychological study of learning embraces more than learning a new job or academic subject. It also has a bearing on the fundamental development, motivation, social behaviour and personality.

According to Tolman (1961) the development of learning is revealed through the changing probability that an awaited behaviour may result. He held the view that learning itself is not observable. It is rather an intervening variable,

one that is inferred as a connecting process between an antecedent variable and consequent behaviour. Hilgard (1962) inferring from Kohler's theory of insight learning stated that 'a learner is a resourceful person, one who is able to use what he knows in new situations and one who is able to discover for himself solutions to problems that he has never before faced'.

Insight learning encourages problem-solving behaviour in the learner. The learner must have prior familiarity with the essentials of the problem. For example, no one can solve a novel algebraic problem without knowing the meaning of the symbols and operations for which they stand. Insight learning requires the learner to see facts in relation to understanding the essentials they bear upon the problem. Insight learning depends upon the capacity of the learner. For example, older children can learn things that younger children cannot learn. This is influenced by past experiences. All instances of learning involve the learner in behaviour of some sort. He learns to do something. An example is learning to read. The same feature of behaviour is exhibited by instances that could be described as learning to become somebody. For example, one can learn to become a teacher. To learn to be somebody is to learn to do something. Learning involves the changing of one's behaviour.

From a variety of instances of learning, Thyme (1970) deduced four features of learning. In the first instance the learner learns to do something. This, he interpreted as a feature of behavioural change. Secondly, he previously did something different. That is a change of behaviour. For the third feature, that change of behaviour occurs in a particular kind of situation. Fourthly, the learner changes from one situation to another. In terms of these four features that appear to characterize learning, any instance of learning must get two responses, namely, old response and a new different response. That is, any instance of learning involves a two-fold series of behaviour. Thyme then defined learning as adopting new response to a situation. This same learning can be applied in the teaching and learning of Social Studies. A fundamental implication of this definition is that learning is not a single 'thing'. It is, on the contrary, a particular pattern or 'Gestalt' of behaviour in relation to some kind of situation.

2.3. The Scope of Social Studies

The term 'scope' had become popular in educational circles after 1945. Developments between the two world wars led to the emergence of new patterns of selecting the content for Social Studies programme. Until quite recently the term 'scope of Social Studies' had been shifting sand (Tamakloe, 1994). Curriculum experts are yet to agree on what the term, scope of Social Studies, is, as it varies from writer to writer.

According to Banks (1990) at the lower grade in school the scope of the subject is based on institutions and communities such as the home, family, the school, the neighbourhood and the community. He goes on further, to say, that at the higher level a variety of elective courses such as sociology, psychology and problems of democracy are offered. In another development, Martorella (1994) writes that most educators would concede that Social Studies gain some of its identity from the social science, such as history, political science, geography, economics, sociology, anthropology and psychology. In explaining the scope of Social Studies, GES (2001) emphasizes that Social Studies takes its source from geography, history, economics and civic education and integrates it in a fashion that creates a subject of its own. Ravitch (2003) sums it up by saying, 'Social Studies is seen as a broad umbrella that covers a range of subjects, disciplines, and skills'. It is significant to note that when subject areas are used to define the scope of Social Studies, perhaps the objective is to promote understanding and values associated with the subject areas.

For Aggarwal (1982) the scope of Social Studies should include a study of relationships, functional study of natural sciences and arts and a study of current affairs. In keeping with this thematic nature, Tamakloe (1991) writes that 'the structure of the content selected for the teaching and learning process in Social Studies must be such that it cuts across disciplines'. To him this can be possible if the content is thematic in nature. He adds; 'themes such as the school community, our local community, the national community our continent and others like citizenship, cooperation, interdependence and nationalism easily lend themselves to organization which relies heavily on the use of concepts, facts, skills and values from various disciplines'. It must be emphasized, however, that Social Studies and social science are distinct programmes. To achieve its overall goals Social Studies promotes learning experiences that have both a distinct content focus and process focus. The latter for instance provides opportunities for learners to become actively involved with interpreting and judging knowledge.

It could be inferred from the discussion that the scope of Social Studies is unlimited. It is in this light that Leming & Ellington (2003) describe the scope of Social Studies as 'boundless, eschewing substantive content and lacking focus for effective practice.' They add, 'students rank Social Studies courses as one of their least liked subjects and Social Studies textbooks are largely superficial and vapid' Zevin (2000) in his 'personal prologue' writes that, 'part of the reason Social Studies is disliked by so many students are the arguments, knowledge of facts, names, places and all the facts they had to know'.

Perhaps the debate about the scope of Social Studies may be partly due to the nature of the subject. According to Tamakloe (1994) the boundless nature exhibited by the scope of Social Studies is the apparent result of the multiplicity of concepts, skills, knowledge, and values that can be utilized to explain issues, phenomena and solve any problem which faces society. Commenting on the nature of Social Studies, Ross and Marker (2005) remarked that:

Social Studies is the most inclusive of all subjects and determining the boundaries of what is taught in Social Studies requires decision about what social knowledge is most important, which skills and behaviours are most valuable, and what values are most significant. As a result, the field curriculum terrain is, has been, and will continue to be subject to debate.

It appears the problem of selection of scope is due partly to subject matter proliferation in Social Studies and also curriculum innovations. In the words of Preston (1985) 'these innovations, influence not only method of study but seek to shape the Social Studies scope and sequence'.

The broad scope of subject matter and the amount of material that could be included in Social Studies is a serious concern for Social Studies education. All agree that selection of what to study is a major issue in planning Social Studies instruction due to its 'competing vision and contradictions' (Evans, 2004). Although Social Studies appears not to have an apparent core content, the challenge for Social Studies curriculum developers is to design an instructional programme that emphasizes depth of important ideas within appropriate breath of topic coverage. Thus, the selection of content must shape the needs of the learner and the nature of the society as they complement each other. A well-rounded Social Studies scope must therefore provide for the development of competencies and dispositions which will enable the learner to be creative, productive and innovative that serves as gateway to quality of life.

3. Research Methodology

The study employed both quantitative and qualitative research approach using specifically the descriptive survey research design. This is because the work involves the collection of data to answer research questions concerning the issue. The target population for the study comprised all Social Studies teachers in the Accra Metropolitan Assembly. The study covered the public Senior High Schools in the Metropolitan. The total population of all the Social Studies teachers in the metropolis is eighty-nine (89). Since the population of Social Studies teachers in the metropolis is 89 which is very small, all of them were used in the study.

3.1. Sample and Sampling Techniques

The total population of teachers handling Social Studies in the metropolis was used. According to the Education Monitoring Information System (EMIS, 2019) of the Accra metropolitan education office, the region has eighty-nine (89) Social Studies teachers in the second cycle schools. The researcher therefore adopted Krejcie and Morgan (1970) in determining the sample size. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970) a population of 89 is appropriate for a sample size of 72. The researcher adopted the simple random sampling and purposive sampling techniques. Simple random sampling technique was used to select the nine (9) schools out of the thirteen (13) public schools in the Accra Metropolitan by using the lottery method. On the other hand, purposive sampling technique was adopted because it clearly defines the characteristics of the research and clearly fits in the objectives of the study. The researcher used the data given to him at the EMIS office by using the lottery method to arrive at a sample size of 72. Below is the table;

Name of School	Number of Social Studies Teachers
Kinbu Sec.Technical	4
Accra Wesley Girls	5
Holy Trinity	3
Wesley Grammar	9
Sacred heart	5
Ebenezer	4
Achimota	11
St. Margaret Mary	5
Accra Girls	8
Accra High	10
Accra Academy	12
Kaneshie Sec/Tech	7
St. Mary's	6
Total	89

*Table 1: Number of Social Studies Teachers in Second Cycle Schools in the Accra Metropolitan
Source: Field Work (2020); N=89*

Out of these thirteen (13) schools above, the lottery method was used to select nine (9) schools randomly to arrive at a sample size of 72. These schools are; Accra Academy, Kaneshie Secondary Technical, St. Mary's, Accra High School, Accra Girls, Ebenezer Senior High, Wesley Grammar, Accra Wesley Girls' and Achimota School.

3.2. Ethical Considerations

Permission and approval were first sought from the Heads of the Senior High Schools which were selected for this study. Individuals sampled for this study were subjected to voluntary participation and they were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. In order to ensure confidentiality, information obtained from the respondents was kept secret whilst their identity was kept anonymous to ensure anonymity. They were assured that whatever information they gave would be used only for academic purposes and would be protected.

3.3. Data Analysis Plan

The responses from the data were analyzed. The data collected were coded, described and statistically analyzed and interpreted. The main statistical techniques for the interpretation were frequencies and percentages which were then presented in the form of tables. This was done using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Analysis of the Questionnaire

4.1.1. Background Information of the Respondents

This section focused on the background information of the respondents who were Social Studies teachers in the Accra Metropolis in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. The background information of the teachers which were considered in this section included; gender, age, level of education, marital status of the teachers and the number of years the teachers have been teaching social teachers in the Senior High School.

Table 2 shows the background information of the Social Studies teachers. From the Table, half (50.0%) of the respondents were males whilst half (50.0%) were females. Again, majority (52.8%) of the teachers were either 35 years or below, 18 (25.0%) were between 36-40 years, 8 (11.1%) were between 41-45 years, 8 (11.1%) were between 46-50 years and none of the teachers were above 50 years. This means that majority of the teachers who were involved in the study were youth. The demographic information of respondents covered in this study are age, level of education, marital status and the number of years of service.

		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	36	50.0
	Female	36	50.0
Age	35 Years and Below	38	52.8
	36-40 Years	18	25.0
	41-45 Years	8	11.1
	46-50 Years	8	11.1
	51 Years and Above	0	0.0
Level of Education	SSS/SHS/O'Level	0	0.0
	A'LEVEL/Post-Secondary	0	0.0
	Diploma/HND	5	6.9
	First Degree	47	65.3
	Master's Degree	20	27.8
Marital Status	Other (Please Specify)	0	0.0
	Single	38	52.8
	Married	34	47.2
	Divorced	0	0.0
Number of Years of Service	Widowed	0	0.0
	5 Years or Less	40	55.6
	6-10 Years	8	11.1
	11-15 Years	8	11.1
	16-20 Years	8	11.1
	More Than 20 Years	8	11.1

Table 1: Demographic Information of the Respondents
Source: Field Work (2020); N=72

It is important therefore to assess the effect of these youths on the attitude formation of the students. Moreover, 47 (65.3%) of the respondents agreed that they have First Degree whilst 20 (27.8%) of the respondents had their Masters and 5 (6.9%) of the respondents had either Diploma or Higher National Diploma (HND). This means that all the respondents had completed their tertiary education and may therefore possess adequate knowledge on the subject matter which the study seeks to uncover. Furthermore, more than half (52.8%) of the teachers were single, 34 (47.2%) of the teachers were married, whilst none of the teachers were either widowed or divorced. This means that majority of the teachers were single. Again, 40 (55.6%) of the teachers have taught Social Studies for 0-5 years, whilst 32 (44.4%) of the teachers have taught for more than 5 years. This means that majority of the teachers who were involved in the study have taught Social Studies for some period. This may be enough knowledge to provide appropriate responses for the items on the instrument.

This section dealt with the discussion of the main data to answer the research questions that were posed to guide the study. In view of this, the discussion is done based on the research questions pertaining to the current study.

4.1.2. What is the attitude of students in the Accra Metropolitan Assembly towards Social Studies?

The research question sought to examine the responses of the teachers on the attitudes of students in the Accra Metropolitan towards Social Studies. The results are presented in Table 3

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Senior High School students are punctual during Social Studies	0	0.0	11	15.3	45	62.5	16	22.2
Students show interest in Social Studies	0	0.0	3	4.2	51	70.8	18	25.0
Students are committed to learning Social	0	0.0	14	19.4	46	63.9	12	16.7
Students find Social Studies classes very	24	33.3	35	48.6	11	15.3	2	2.8
Students find it easy in learning Social Studies	2	2.8	10	13.9	44	61.1	16	22.2
Students take Social Studies assignment seriously	0	0.0	22	30.5	46	63.9	4	5.6

Table 2: Attitude of Students towards Social Studies

Source: Field Survey, (2020); F-Frequency

Data from Table 3 above shows the responses of the teachers on the attitude of students towards Social Studies. The results indicated that 61 (84.7%) of the teachers agreed that on the punctuality of students and 11 (15.3%) disagreed. Paying attention to the interest of students in Social Studies, the results portrayed that 69 (95.8%) of the teachers agreed that students show interest in Social Studies and 3 (4.2%) disagreed. Owing to the commitment of the students in learning the subject, 58 (80.6%) agreed and 14 (19.4%) disagreed.

Additionally, 13 (18.1) of the teachers agreed that students find Social Studies classes very boring whilst 59 (81.9%) disagreed. Furthermore, majority 60 (83.3%) of the teachers agreed that students find it easy in learning Social Studies and 12 (16.7%) disagreed. Finally, the results highlighted that 50 (69.5%) agreed that students take Social Studies assignments seriously and 22 (30.5%) disagreed.

The teachers were asked that what other attitudes of senior high school students are exhibited towards social students in the metropolitan. Some said that the students lack of enthusiasm and interest in the subject. It was said that the students sometimes do not show much seriousness in group work and presentations. They are also lazy in writing Social Studies notes and if they have their way, they will not study Social Studies. The students are of the opinion that the subject is not difficult, thus they do not attend class during Social Studies lessons. Again, students perceive Social Studies as a reading subject hence less commitment. They also have the mentality that it is easy to pass the subject 'Social Studies'. One teacher said:

'The students' readiness to learn is there but sometimes feels self-complacent'.

Another added:

'Most senior high students exhibit the attitude of complacency. They think it is easy to pass and are always satisfied with their lots'.

Another teacher also said:

'Students are not all that serious in learning Social Studies as they learn subjects like Mathematics and English. They underrate the subject: they think some of the topics are familiar. Some of the topics are technical so if we do not use the right teaching, it makes it boring'.

One added:

'Students also see the subject as a less difficult one so they do not actually pay attention when it is being taught'.

Some teachers (10%) from Accra Academy were also of the view that:

'Because most topics in Social Studies are easily relatable, students do not really have the urge to seriously learn it'.

On the contrary, the students also exhibit all seriousness towards Social Studies since the course is a requirement. They also find the subject interesting and are always ready to add their contributions and personal experiences to make lessons very meaningful and more interesting. They are mostly likely to be involved in group studies and discussions. The students

also give constructive contribution and they have knowledge about the subject because most topics are a part of their everyday life.

One teacher said:

'This is a course student do not need remedial on. In other words, it is fairly easy to pass Social Studies'.

One teacher added:

'The students feel at ease in the study of Social Studies lessons hence performance is always very good'.

5. Conclusion

In summary, the principal purpose of this study was to examine the attitude of students towards the learning of Social Studies and performance in the Accra Metropolitan Assembly in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. The researcher used descriptive survey as the research design and questionnaires were used as the research instrument to collect data from the students. A sample size of seventy-two (72) Social Studies teachers were sampled through the simple random sampling and purposive sampling technique. The results of the study were analysed and presented in simple frequencies and percentage tables which were generated from the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0.

Key findings that emanated from the study revealed that students in the Accra Metropolitan Assembly performed averagely in Social Studies and exhibits positive attitudes towards Social Studies. This is evident from the punctuality of students during Social Studies class, students' interest in Social Studies, student's commitment to learning Social Studies and students taking Social Studies assignments seriously.

From the findings of the study, the researcher can conclude that students in the Accra Metropolitan Assembly performed averagely in Social Studies and have positive attitudes towards Social Studies.

6. Recommendations

From the key findings and the conclusions drawn from the study, it has been recommended that the Ghana Education Service should recruit professional teachers to teach Social Studies in Senior High schools. This will help in giving them knowledge to become excellent students in Social Studies. Also, teachers of Social Studies should make the class lively to solve the problem of period boredomness on the part of the learners in the teaching and learning process.

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