

Research Article

Students' Perceptions of the objectives and Contents of the College of Education Social Studies Curriculum: Challenges in Perspective

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Abstract: The purpose of the study was to examine the objectives and contents of Social Studies and its related challenges facing the Colleges of Education in Ghana. The study adopted a quantitative research approach. The population comprises tutors and students of Social Studies in the three (3) Colleges of Education in the Central Region of Ghana. The purposive sampling technique was used to select the three Colleges of Education and twenty (20) Social Studies tutors. Krejcie and Morgan's table was used to determine sample size two and forty-eight (248) students out of seven hundred (700) students. The main instrument for data collection was a questionnaire. The quantitative data entry and analysis were done using IBM SPSS Statistics software, version 22. Frequencies and percentages were used as statistical tools to analyse responses to all the research questions. The study revealed that students in the Colleges of Education of Ghana had had an understanding of the Social Studies programme in terms of objectives, content, and scope as well as the integrated nature of the subject and its usefulness in the resolution of social problems. The study also indicated teachers who may not be well versed in specific topics in the subject and may either skip it or teach it anyhow. It is recommended that regular workshops and conferences be organised for Social Studies teachers of the Colleges of Education in order to update their knowledge on some topics especially current issues on the subject. It is also recommended that Social Studies teachers should be encouraged to engage the services of resource persons to support them teach unfamiliar or challenging topics to avoid polluting the pre-service teachers.

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1. Introduction

Social Studies is a multi-disciplinary subject that aims to equip learners with knowledge, attitudes, values and skills that will enable them to become active, informed, innovative, and responsible citizens. Social Studies addresses the challenges or problems that confront and threaten the survival of the Ghanaian society. It does so, by providing the learner with the opportunity to apply concepts, theories and generalisations from a variety of relevant disciplines to analyse, investigate and come out with appropriate solutions to personal and societal problems. It provides an opportunity for learners to further explore their immediate environment and the world at large. Therefore, Social Studies specifically focuses on developing the learners' curiosity, critical thinking, problem-solving skills and competencies for personal development and leadership. Besides, it seeks to enhance communication and collaboration, creativity and innovation, digital literacy, cultural identity and global citizenship [1]. Social Studies is one of the

subjects taught in Colleges of Education and student-teachers are prepared to teach it at the Basic Schools in Ghana [2]. Social Studies was an integral part of Social Sciences for the purpose of attending to Social Welfare and subsequently grounded in the Social Sciences for the purpose of directly educating future citizens [3]. This means that Social Studies, therefore evolved as a curricular need to serve a purpose for the development of students to fit well into their society. Most countries in Africa, the introduction of Social Studies as part of the school's curriculum was preceded by the formation of the African Social Studies Programme (ASSP) in 1968 [2, 4]. A study indicated that in Ghana, like other African countries, Social Studies was introduced as a brainchild of ASSP in 1972 [2]. The purpose set forth by the Mombasa Conference in 1968 is that the integrated Social Studies is supposed to enable every school-going child in Africa to: understand people's interaction with the cultural, social and physical environment; appreciate home and heritage; develop skills and attitudes expected of citizens; and learn to express ideas in many ways [2, 5].

Social Studies aims at helping the learner to be competent, reflective and concerned citizens. This can be achieved through the use of different techniques of teaching like project work, quizzes, and simulation among others. If Social Studies is to succeed, no matter how carefully curriculum and materials are planned, teachers who are the implementers need to be effectively trained in Social Studies pedagogy. In order to achieve this, teachers' understanding of Social Studies and the methods and strategies in teaching Social Studies programme is very important, as far as the subject is concerned [6, 7]. It is against this background that an investigation of teachers' perception of Social Studies and how they teach the subject at the Junior High Schools (JHS) should be given the necessary attention; although Social Studies is seen as an integrated body of knowledge, there is an issue of an acceptable level of integration [8]. At all levels of education, the goal of Social Studies has been characterized as:

- transmission of the cultural heritage;
- methods of inquiry;
- reflective inquiry;
- informed social criticism; and
- personal developments [9].

Personal development has traditionally received the greatest emphasis at the elementary level; at the high school level, methods of inquiry have received more emphasis. The basic goal of Social Studies education is to prepare young people to be humane, rational, participating citizens in a world that is becoming increasingly interdependent [10]. The objectives which are spelled in the definition of a discipline form the bases for developing a curriculum. However, a lack of consensus in defining a subject may sway away and turn the various components of a discipline [8]. In Ghana, the teaching syllabus for Social Studies prepares students by equipping them with knowledge about the culture and ways of life of their society, its problems, its values and its hopes for the future [11]. This clearly shows that it is accepted that the ultimate aim of Social Studies is seen as Citizenship Education. Social Studies should be taught as a holistic subject, which should reflect a behavioural change in students and not facts from other social sciences. Social Studies teachers should stress the teaching of skills more than factual content. The main role of the Social Studies teacher is to emphasize the development of relevant knowledge, positive attitudes, value and problem-solving skills of students. This, notwithstanding, a research conducted on Social Studies curriculum feeding and implementation challenges in Ghana, revealed that Teacher Training Institutions subscribe and use a particular conception of Social Studies curriculum for the production of Social Studies education graduates. The implication here is that teachers may come to conceptualize the subject differently [13].

A study recommended that if importance is attached to Social Studies then resources already invested in its implementation in Ghana must be followed by programme review and remedial measures taken early, so as to make it more effective and viable. However, documentary evidence on the Social Studies curriculum prepared for Colleges of Education in Ghana shows clear differences in relation to how the Basic School teaching syllabus for Social Studies is structured. The College of Education Social Studies curriculum seems not to reflect the problem-solving perspective of the subject in Ghana. As a result of the possible differences in curriculum conception of Social Studies by Colleges of Education in relation to the Basic School Social Studies curriculum in Ghana, trained teachers may conceptualize the subject differently [8].

Teachers' conception represents part of teachers' mental contents or schemas that influence Social Studies curriculum and its implementation in Ghana is worthy of academic discourse. A study pointed out that there are Forty-Six (46) public Colleges of Education in Ghana, all of which turn out about 15,000 teachers annually. These teachers are expected to teach various subjects including Social Studies at the basic level of education. Products of the Colleges of Education, thus, have an onerous responsibility of laying a firm and sound foundation in the educational career of the children entrusted into their care. This implies that a clearer conception of Social Studies at the Colleges of Education need not to be taken for granted if quality trained Social Studies teachers are to be produced from the colleges [13]. Teachers need to be reminded of their primary function which is to facilitate learning and if this will be possible they have to be familiar with the major objectives in their subject areas and to practice formulating objectives in all the domains of learning for specific topics following the different classifications [14, 15-17]. This is because, if objectives are formulated in all domains of learning, it will not be difficult for the teachers to assess the students in the three domains. Teachers should also realize that the inclusion of affective and psychomotor assessments, as distinctive features of assessment is a step at getting the truest possible picture of a learner. This will provide feedback about teachers and students effectiveness. Teachers' conception represents part of teachers' mental contents or schemas that influence approaches and practice of teaching [18]. It is in this light that, evaluation of Colleges of Education (CoE) Social Studies curriculum vis-à-vis the Junior High School (JHS) Social Studies curriculum and its implementation in Ghana is worthy of an academic discourse [19].

There are "confusing arrays of conceptual perspectives concerning the aims, nature and content of Social Studies and that cultivation of a clearer conception of the subject in Ghana has become very necessary" [8]. This implies that evaluation of social studies curriculum and students' learning in Social Studies needs to be taken seriously [20]. The pedagogical content knowledge of Social Studies teachers do influence the way they assess their lessons [21]. This assertion implies that "the background knowledge of Social Studies teachers is built from their training institutions and this goes to influence the way they teach (i.e. selection of content, unit or topic, formulation of objective(s), mode of teaching, and assessment tool used)." [8] As a result of this, implementers of Social Studies curriculum need to be abreast with how the subject is taught and assessed. Researchers revealed in a study that "due to the hasty nature in formulating formative assessment and scoring, tutors place emphasis on cognitive domain to the neglect of affective and psychomotor domains which are also of paramount importance." With this, much is needed to assist Social Studies teachers to be abreast with the nature and the content of Social Studies in a harmonized subject matter required to improve the quality of teaching and learning [6]. This posit that Social Studies Teachers' Conception and efficacy beliefs can never be underestimated in the evaluation of Junior High Schools curriculum in Ghana [22]. The Social Studies Syllabus for Ghanaian Senior High Schools is replete with concepts that are taught and learnt. Sometimes the calibre of teachers who teach the subject and their attitude towards the teaching and learning of the subject hamper grasping of the concepts that are presented in the Social Studies lessons [23]. Social Studies

teachers' knowledge in profile dimensions of the subject enable them employ its usage in the teaching and learning process so as to achieve the desired goal (s) and objectives of the subject [24]. This implies that background knowledge of teachers in using techniques and strategies assessing Social Studies concepts in Ghana has become necessary to build Ghanaian society better and faster growth in development. This method offers learners opportunity to be actively involved in the teaching and learning process to discover knowledge for themselves [25]. A study concluded that, in respect to the teaching effectiveness of Social Studies teachers must be in their optimum best in terms of planning and preparation, instructional skills, classroom management, communication skills and assessment skills in achieving objectives of the subject [26].

The quality of instruction is one of the determinative factors in any instructional programme. The teaching and learning of Social Studies appear to have been beset with many challenges. The most pressing of these appears to be a lack of competent teachers to effectively handle the subject at the Colleges of Education in Ghana. A lack of competent teachers as one of the major challenges facing the teaching of the subject in the Colleges of Education. He was of the view that the effective teaching of Social Studies requires that the teacher possesses adequate knowledge in several of the social science disciplines or subject areas [27]. The teachers who handle the subject at the Colleges of Education must also possess the skill to correlate and integrate knowledge. This quality appears missing in some teachers at the Colleges of Education in Ghana which is affecting the way the subject is taught at the JHS level [19].

Again, there seems to be a lack of enthusiasm on the part of both teachers and students in the teaching and learning of Social Studies. Many studies have indicated that students perceive Social Studies as an uninteresting subject. Social Studies has a secondary status among other social science subjects thus making it difficult to convince both students and teachers about the importance of the subject and its usefulness in the school's curriculum [28]. Again, in spite of the immense contribution of Social Studies in preparing the individual to fit well into society by equipping him or her with the requisite knowledge about culture of their society, its challenges, values and aspirations for the future, there appears to be an apparent lack of empirical research regarding how the subject is taught in the Colleges of Education in Ghana and this has influenced the study as well.

Research findings revealed that the Colleges of Education (CoE) in Ghana use a particular conception of Social Studies for the production of Social Studies teachers, which is very different from that of the JHS. The Colleges of Education rather subscribe to and employ an amalgamation of disciplines perspective, where facts, concepts, and generalizations are bootlegged from the social sciences [19]. Although both the CoE and JHS Social Studies curricula see the subject as an integration of knowledge, the point of contention has been the nature and acceptable level of integration [29]. This implies that a gap is being created in the knowledge and the ideal practices of the subject in the Colleges of Education in Ghana. There was, therefore, the need to conduct a study to investigate the objectives and contents Social Studies and its related challenges facing the Colleges of Education in Ghana (1). What are the students' perception of the objectives and contents of the College of Education Social Studies? (2). What challenges confront Social Studies teachers in the Colleges of Education?

2. Materials and Methods

The study adopted quantitative research approach. The population consists of tutors and students of social studies in the three (3) Colleges of Education in the Central Region of Ghana. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the three Colleges of Education and twenty (20) Social Studies tutors. Krejcie and Morgan's table was used to determining sample size two and forty-eight (248) students out of seven hundred (700) students. The main instrument for data collection was questionnaire. A 4-point Likert type

scale questionnaire was used to collect data from participants. The scales are: Strongly Agree=4, Agree=3, Disagree =2, and Strongly Disagree=1. Two sets of questionnaires were developed. These were teachers' questionnaires and Social Studies students' questionnaires. To ensure validity in the study, I discussed the questionnaire with my colleagues at OLA College of Education (peer jury). Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was used to analyse the data. Coefficient of 0.7 and 0.8 respectively was determined as the reliabilities of the two questionnaires. The quantitative data entry and analysis was done by using IBM SPSS Statistics software, version 22. Frequencies and percentages were used as statistical tools to analyse responses from all the research questions.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Students' Perception of the Objectives and Contents of the College of Education Social Studies

The objectives of a subject are the intended behavioural change, which a learner is expected to exhibit after undergoing a learning experience while the content is the body of knowledge or information, which is presented to students [31]. Data were gathered on students on the objectives and contents of Social Studies taught in the Colleges of Education, to find out whether they satisfy the purpose of introducing the subject into the curriculum by the Ghana Education Service. Frequencies and percentages were used to identify the mode of the responses involving a 4-point rating scale. Summary of the responses is captured in Table 3. In the discussion, 'Strongly Agree' and 'Agree' were joined as Agree while 'Disagree' and 'Strongly Disagree' were joined as Disagree for clarity of purpose and for easy discussion.

Table 1. Opinions of Students' on the Objectives and Content of College of Education Social Studies Curriculum (N=248)

S/N	Variables	Frequency				Decision
		SA	A	D	SD	
1	Social Studies aims at equipping teacher trainees with professional knowledge.	135(54.4%)	111(44.8%)	2(.8%)	-	Agree
2	Social Studies equips students with skills to teach at the basic level.	115(46.4%)	130(52.4%)	2(0.8%)	1 (0.4%)	Agree
3	Social Studies helps students to develop good values and attitudes.	186(75%)	61(24.6%)	1(0.4%)	-	Agree
4	Social Studies aims at giving citizenship education to learners.	157(63.3%)	91 (36.7)	-	-	Agree
5	The content of Social Studies cuts across disciplines.	118 (47.6%)	122 (49.2%)	7(2.8%)	1(0.4%)	Agree
6	The limitless scope of Social Studies makes it uncomfortable to learners.	43 (17.3%)	78(31.5%)	104 (41.9%)	23(9.3%)	Disagree

From Table 1, all the 248 respondents representing 100% agreed to items 1 and 4 which indicate that "Social Studies aims at equipping teacher trainees with professional knowledge", and "Social Studies aims at giving citizenship education to learners" respectively. Similarly, majority (98.8%) of the respondents indicated that 'Social Studies equips students with skills to teach at the Basic School level with 99.6% indicating that Social Studies helps students to develop good values and attitudes in society. Again, 96.8% of the respondents agreed with the statement "The content of Social Studies cuts

across disciplines". These findings was supported by earlier research that Social Studies is an integrated field of study which focuses on the individuals' in their environments with a view to sensitizing them with the symbiotic relationships or interactions between them and their environments and equipping them with the intellectual reflective or contemplative skills to identify and conquer their lives and environmental problems and make their social living worth the bother. Furthermore, Social Studies inculcates in individuals with the socially approved and desirable value systems and attitudes [32]. Another study also agreed with the findings of this research that the purpose of Social Studies is citizenship education which aimed at providing students opportunities for an examination, critique and revision of the past traditions, existing social practices and model of problem-solving [33]. The structure of the tertiary level Social Studies curriculum draws concept from many other disciplines and synchronizes them together as advocated [27]. The limitless scope of Social Studies does not discourage learners in learning the subject. This was revealed by majority (51.2%) of the respondents. Regarding opinions of students' on the objectives and content of College of Education Social Studies curriculum, it was revealed that they satisfy the purpose of introducing integrated Social Studies in the curriculum as captured in the Ghana education service report in 1998. For instance, the students agreed with the statement that Social Studies is intended to help the pre-service teachers develop good values and attitudes acceptable in their societies. Many Social Studies educationists in Ghana believe that Social Studies was introduced into the school curriculum with the intention of solving social problems which bedeviled the Ghanaian society [11, 34]. It is therefore expected that knowledge of Social Studies will assist students to understand the way of life of their society and enable them function effectively. Again, it was expected that the seemingly limitless scope of Social Studies will usually make the study uncomfortable to students but the finding turned otherwise where 51.2% of the student respondents disagreed with this assertion.

3.2. What challenges confront Social Studies Teachers in the Colleges of Education?

The opinions of College of Education teachers about their challenges encountered in relation to the teaching of Social Studies were elicited using a 4-point Rating Scale involving 7 items. Table 6 presents the summary of the result.

Table 2. Challenges Confronting Social Studies Teachers in the Colleges of Education (N=20)

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Decision
1	My school has a few reference materials.	6(30%)	10 (50%)	2(10%)	2 (10%)	Agree
2	There is poor History and Geography background of students.	7(35%)	10 (50%)	3(15%)	-	Agree
3	There is lack of Social Studies Resource Centres at the Colleges of Education.	9(45%)	10 (50%)	1(5%)	-	Agree
4	The period on the time table for teaching the subject is not adequate.	5(25%)	11(55%)	3(15%)	1(5%)	Agree
5	Large class size affects my teaching negatively.	6(30%)	9(45%)	3(15%)	2 (10%)	Agree
6	Some teachers find it difficult to teach some of the topics in the subject.	3(15%)	10(50%)	5(25%)	2(10%)	Agree
7	There is lack of regular workshop on teaching of Social Studies.	9(45%)	9(45%)	2(10%)	-	Agree

Table 2, revealed that there were few Social Studies reference materials in the schools. This was indicated by 16 (80%) of the teacher participants. Eighty-five percent of the

participants have poor History and Geography backgrounds of students as a challenge for the teaching of Social Studies. This is as a result of the fact that Social Studies is an interdisciplinary subject which cuts across areas such as Political Science, Sociology, Humanities, Religion among others and none of these subject areas is treated in details in Social Studies. Consequently, students end up not learning enough of a particular subject area such History and Geography as a component of Social Studies. The need for Social Studies Resource Centres in the Colleges of Education was emphasised by 95% of the teachers as another challenge which adversely affects the teaching and learning of the subject. Another challenge was mentioned by 65% of participants, that some teachers find it difficult to teach some of the topics in the Social Studies syllabus and skip them as a result. Finally, 90% of the participants mentioned lack of regular workshop for teachers as another factor hindering the effective teaching and learning of Social Studies.

In respect of the data collected on challenges facing teachers on teaching and learning of Social Studies in the Colleges of Education, the finding revealed inadequate reference materials and poor History and Geography backgrounds of students which make teaching and learning more difficult for both teachers and learners respectively. This is as a result of the fact that Social Studies is an interdisciplinary subject which cuts across areas such as Political Science, Sociology, Humanities, Religion, among others. The need for Social Studies Resource Centres in the Colleges of Education was emphasised by 95% of the teachers as another challenge which adversely affects the teaching and learning of the subject. Situations where some teachers find it difficult to teach certain topics in Social Studies and decide to skip was also identified as a major challenge associated with the teaching of Social Studies in the Colleges of Education. Ninety percent (90%) of the participants mentioned lack of regular workshop for teachers as another factor hindering the effective teaching and learning of Social Studies. Professional development training can help teachers to become better at planning their time and staying organised. Effective professional development enables teachers to develop the knowledge and skill they need to address students learning challenges [23, 35].

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study revealed that students in the Colleges of Education of Ghana had had understanding of the Social Studies programme in terms of objectives, content and scope as well as the integrated nature of the subject and its usefulness in the resolution of social problems. This implies that Social Studies curriculum is relevant to the objectives of the subject. The study also indicated teachers who may not be well versed in certain topics in the subject and may either skip it or teach it anyhow. When this happens it implies there will be a gap in the syllabus in terms of content learnt by the students and they will also skip these topics during teaching because of lack of information. However, aside these challenges the content of every subject must be relevant to the aims and objectives of the subject. The study also indicated that some teachers skipping some Social Studies topics because they do not have adequate information on them. It is recommended that regular workshops and conferences be organised for Social Studies teachers of the Colleges of Education in order to update their knowledge on some topics especially current issues on the subject. It is also recommended that Social Studies teachers should be encouraged to engage the services of resources persons to support them teach unfamiliar or challenging topics to avoid polluting the pre-service teachers.

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