

Article

An Empirical Study of Challenges and Management Supports in Teaching and Learning of Social Studies in the Public Senior High Schools of Ghana

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to examine the challenges and management supports in teaching and learning of Social Studies in Public Senior High Schools in Akuapem South and North Districts in the Eastern Region of Ghana. Quantitatively, the study adopted a cross-sectional survey using a descriptive correlational research design to assess Challenges and Management Supports Teaching and Learning of Social Studies in Public Senior High Schools of Ghana. The population of the study comprised social studies teachers and students in the Akuapem South and Akuapem North Districts of the Eastern Region of Ghana. Purpose and probabilistic sampling procedures were used to select senior high schools, teachers and students for the study. The main instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire (SQ). Data was collected from 261 final year students from five Senior High Schools and 33 Social Studies teachers using structured questionnaire. Data was analysed using SPSS Version 24. Descriptive statistics (mean, SD) was conducted to summarise the data and t-test was applied to establish if there is a statistically significant difference in the perceptions of students and teachers on the school-based drivers and effective teaching and learning of social studies. The results of the study revealed that the key school-based drivers influencing the teaching and learning of social studies in the two districts relate to classroom environment; lack of management supports in terms of resource provision for practical lessons, lack of supportive physical environment such as large class size ($t = 32.881$, mean difference = 6.2422, $p < 0.05$)- thus preventing teachers from engaging students in practical work and individualising their assignments (t -statistics=37.563, mean difference= 3.0920, $p < 0.05$); and teachers inability to use diagnostics assessment tools to unraveled students difficulties and support them. The conclusion is that, the key drivers influencing effective teaching and learning of social studies are school-based and policy driven. The study therefore recommends that the government should support the teaching of Social Studies through provision of adequate resources to help teachers improve their output. Again, the student-teacher ratio should be reduced.

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1. Introduction

The role of Social Studies as a subject cannot be overemphasised within the Ghanaian Educational System. It has become one of the core subjects in the Senior High School. The subject has also gained much ground at the University level and Colleges of Education in Ghana. In Ghana, Social Studies Education (SSE) interconnects the human and natural environment and the interrelated nature of events, problems, or ideas. The study of society, which is an integral field that draws its subject matter from various other disciplines, helps students fit well into society [1]. There is therefore no doubt that the

socio-economic and political development of any given society depends on the awareness of its citizens, and this is largely determined by their level of Social Studies education. Thus, the role of Social studies in preparing individuals to fit into society by equipping them with critical thinking and problem-solving skills, knowledge about the culture of their society and the global world and their problems, values and hopes for the future cannot be overemphasised. The implication here is that teaching and learning about how to inculcate into students how to become competent, reflective and responsible citizens and the functions of democratic government or decision-making cannot be only based on local or central paradigms [2]. Surprisingly, in Ghana the performance of students in Social Studies in WASSCE continuously to decline over the past years. For example, the Chief Examiners in respect of the performance of candidates in the West African Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) saw a decline in performance over the years [3].

The Social Studies education in Ghana therefore has the goal of producing good citizens of the Ghanaian society in compliance with the nation-state structure. In these respects, the question of raising citizens who understand the basic concepts of Social Studies is frequently emphasised. To achieve this, the teaching and learning of Social Studies in the SHS classrooms should be meaningful, integrative, value-based, challenging active and inquiry-based. However, the reverse is often observed in most SHSs, thus raising questions about students' poor performance in Social Studies in WASSCE. The poor performance of students in Social Studies at the WASSCE has been highlighted in the annual WASSCE Chief Examiners' Reports [3, 4]. The Reports largely attributed candidates' abysmal performance to lack of knowledge of the subject matter and inability to establish the nexus between concepts as well as inadequate preparation. The reports further expound that candidates' performance in both written and practical work was comparatively low to what is regarded as the norms of Standard Performance in the subject.

The researcher would like to believe that certain school-based drivers connected with classroom environment; learner's dispositions; teacher quality; management support; supportive physical environments and assessment modes may be the antecedent factors causing teachers and students to be less successful in teaching and learning the subject as integrated discipline, respectively. Thus, the main objective of this study was to assess school-based drivers influencing the teaching and learning of Social Studies in the SHSs in two districts —the Akuapem South and Akuapem North of the Eastern Region. The purpose of this study was to examine the challenges and management supports in teaching and learning Social Studies in Public Senior High Schools in the Akuapem South and North Districts of Ghana. The study was guided by these research questions (1) What are the challenges associated with the teaching and learning of Social Studies in the public senior high schools in the Akuapem South and North Districts? (2) What are the existing management supports for Social Studies Education in the senior high schools in Akuapem South and Akuapem North Districts?

1.1. Problems Faced by Social Studies Teachers

Like any other subject, Social Studies teachers are faced with some problems or challenges in the delivery of their duties. Most Social Studies teachers are not trained in Social Studies, especially those from Universities that do not offer teacher education. These teachers are given the subject to handle, due to a lack of trained teachers in the field. This phenomenon largely affects the effective delivery of the subject matter and consequently affects students' performance negatively [5]. The National Council for Social Studies (NCSS), allows non-professionals into the field to teach the subject. Some Social Studies teachers do not have the requisite content and pedagogical knowledge to teach the subject thereby denying students to effectively grasp the themes and understand the concepts to be able to solve the societal problems which affect pupils' level of motivation

[6]. This posits that Social Studies is an integrated discipline which is full of concepts which require a resourceful teacher to handle it [7].

Again, when the contact hours allocated for the subject are few on the timetable, it causes teachers unable to complete the curriculum and this again affects students' learning outcomes. Social Studies Education is perceived to be an easy subject in that any person can teach it and learners can learn at their chosen time and perform well in examinations [8]. The subject is not treated as an integrated unit of study but as an aspect of Social Science such as History, Geography and Economics. Learners do not put into practice what they have learnt in society which affects their moral uprightness and discipline [8]. To the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports (MESS), there is less number of periods allocated to the subject on the time table and sometimes large class size affects teaching and learning negatively. There are no well-planned programmes initiated by policymakers and professional trainers to complement the initial teacher preparation programme to continue to provide educational development for Social Studies teachers throughout their career path but rather an ad hoc nature of Continuing Teacher Professional Development in the schools [9]. This indicates that teacher preparation enhances students' motivation, helps focus student learning and decreases classroom management challenges [10].

There was a mission link in the body of knowledge for teaching of subjects [11, 12]. There are inadequate resources such as resource persons, resource centres and reference materials in the effective delivery of the subject. All these affect the effective teaching and learning of Social Studies in the classroom [14]. A study discovered that a lack of cooperation from community members to help teachers identify useful resources in the community to use in teaching affects teaching. Due to the ad hoc nature of continuing professional development programmes most of the teachers are dogmatic and thereby lack the basic knowledge to impact students and find it difficult to teach the subject [7]. In my view, it is evident that the development of the subject is at a slow pace due to the fact that the appointment of teachers is not well regulated thereby making teachers of the subject not perform up to expectation.

Another problem identified by researchers was that older students do not feel Social Studies is important in preparing them for the future [13]. Students' poor attitude was directly influenced by the attitudes of teachers themselves because of the way the materials are presented in the curriculum [15, 16]. Many teachers struggling with Social Studies had a poor attitude that was influenced by curriculum guidelines and the way they strangled opportunities to effectively teach the material [17]. This ultimately reflects in learners' negative manner and retention of ideas and concepts [18]. The subject is affected by administration, state mandates and standardised testing [19]. Echoing this idea was the fact that many teachers and administrators felt the more pressing need to develop Reading and Mathematics skills for testing purposes took time from the Social Studies Curriculum [20]. This implies that the problems teachers face is complex in nature in that curriculum developers and administrators do not work together to solve the problems confronted by the subject.

1.2. Management Support and Policy

Management support and supportive physical environments worked into the school's organisational climate. Organisational climate is a measure of characteristics that are directly or indirectly perceived by people living and working in the workplace, and that are supposed to affect their motivations and behaviour, consists of the attitudes and beliefs of individuals in the workplace [21]. At this point, organisational climate comes to mind when based on the subjective interpretations of events and behaviours of employees in the organisation, and this overlaps with objective reality. The organisational climate was first popularised in 1960 by George Sterns in his study of higher education institutions and later by the Studies of Andrew Halpin and Don Croft [22]. The concept of

organisational climate has been further developed by the use of these concepts in schools [23]. Different descriptive and measurement tools are used in the Studies explaining the organisational climate but the nexus between the individuals in the organisation is emphasised as common and an evaluation of the individuals is given related to the organisations [24, 25].

As an educational organisation, the organisational climate of the school, the ecological environment in which the school is located, the Social environment, and the dynamic interaction between the organisation and culture are the result. Individuals working at the school and students are part of this interaction. Their perception of the organisation is due to this interaction. Based on the ecological theory developed by Bronfenbrenner in 1994, the school climate reflects the processes in which all the individuals in the school actively participate and cooperate [26]. Social and economic environment, the school climate with all its needs is an interactive process jointly established by pupils, teachers, and parents [27].

Examining the interactions between these components of the school climate allows for a more qualified and productive learning environment. Closely linked to support is Management Policy. Research shows that not only teachers but also school directors are an important factor in the quality and effectiveness of education [28, 29]. The amount and quality of feedback teachers receive from directors affects the quality of the education they provide. In addition, the feedback provided to the teachers gives the message that their work is valuable, thus ensuring that teachers perform better in the profession [30, 31]. Direct support includes frequent constructive feedback on teacher performance, useful information, an equitable attitude towards employees, and encouraging employees to improve themselves professionally. Administrative support in education is among the most important predictors of teachers' positive perceptions about their work and the effectiveness of education [29, 32].

The clear definition of the policies, regulations, programmes, rules and responsibilities applied in SHS is of great importance for the overall efficiency of the SHS. Clarity refers to the explicit identification and application of organisational functioning. Developing a clear understanding of what employees are doing and what they expect are among the components of a positive climate [30]. The lack of clarity in rules, regulations and organisational practices in school results in increased work stress and even burnout [33]. The stated policies of the organisations also affect a manager's leadership style. In organizations where climate and policies encourage strict accountability for expenses and results, managers usually supervise and control subordinates tightly.

1.2.1. Decision-making

Decision-making in schools refers to the sharing of power among education and administrative staff, who decides which decisions are taken, and how people are referred to the decisions taken [30]. These decisions may include topics such as managerial, vocational, educational, financial issues or human resources, school-family relationships and evaluation. In the decision-making process, healthy sharing between education and administrative staff ensures that employees have confidence in themselves, democratic decisions are taken and implemented at the institution, concrete achievements are reached, and school management is supported [34, 35]. In order to have a positive organisational climate in schools, it is necessary to establish a decision-making structure that is flexible and facilitated by the participation of everyone working in the institution.

1.2.2. Goal consensus

This component of organisational climate means developing a common vision for the school among employees. In particular, there should be common educational objectives on how children will go through the education process and what they will gain at the end. The differences in individual characteristics, life philosophies, and professional

experience make it difficult to reach a consensus on goals. In this respect, ensuring compromise in the educational goals of the school reflects the skills of the individuals to tolerate differences and to be able to do teamwork [30].

1.2.3. Task Orientation

Task orientation focuses on the planning of tasks in an organisation, the completion of tasks on time, and the efficiency of the organisation. It can be seen that time is used effectively in a positive organizational climate where employees are not engaged in activities that prevent them from performing their primary tasks. In these institutions, the meetings are clearly planned with clear objectives and there are few delays in meetings or other activities [30]. However, having a positive organisational climate does not mean having a very strict regime because it is not possible to assess the opportunities that develop spontaneously in institutions where there are very strict rules and practices. The task-oriented nature of an institution means that all employees are engaged with their primary tasks and that routines are unhindered and performed in a timely manner with the most effective use of time in accordance with specific goals.

2. Materials and Methods

Quantitatively, the study adopted a cross-sectional survey using a descriptive correlational research design to assess Challenges and Management Supports Teaching and Learning of Social Studies in Public Senior High Schools of Ghana. The population of the study comprised social studies teachers and students in the Akuapem South and Akuapem North Districts of the Eastern Region of Ghana. Purpose and probabilistic sampling procedures were used to select senior high schools, teachers and students for the study. Five (5) SHSs were selected from a total of ten (10) SHSs within the two districts. The schools were selected using a probabilistic sampling procedure. This sampling technique was employed in the selection of the schools to help avoid bias in the school selection process. Thirty-three (33) teachers comprising 26 males (78.8%) and 7 females (21.2%) were purposively selected to validate the data collected from the students. The students were selected from the 2020 final year cohort who have received Social Studies Education for four years. From the sample frame, a total of 265 students were recruited for the study of which 261 responded. This selection was done using probability sampling procedures to ensure that all the students in the selected SHSs have equal representation in the sample and also have an equal and independent chance of being selected as respondents, respectively. Table 1 shows the proportion of the sample selected for the study.

Table 1. Proportional Distribution of Students in the Study Sample

Districts	Name of Participating SHSs Schools	School Enrolment	Total	Percentage Enrolment
Akuapem North	Mt Sinai	530	1391	43.1
	Okuapeman	861		
Akuapem South	Aburi Girls	457	1857	56.9
	Aburi Secondary Technical	800		
	Adonten	600		
Total			3248	100

The main instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire (SQ). The data was analysed using SPSS Software Version 24 (IBM) (SPSS Inc. Chicago, Illinois, USA). Descriptive and T-test statistics were used to analyse data collected using the questionnaire. Descriptive statistics was used to summarise the data that was gathered using the questionnaire into frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation. T-test statistics were used to compare the Challenges and Management of students and

teachers on existing school-based drivers influencing the teaching and learning of Social Studies in the Public SHSs in the two Districts.

3. Results

The study examined the Challenges and Management support teaching and Learning of Social Studies in the five Public Senior High Schools and five public SHSs in the Akuapem South and Akuapem North districts of Ghana. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire. The reliability of items on the questionnaire guide was tested using Cronbach's Alpha statistics. A t-test was performed to establish if there is a statistically significant difference in the Challenges and Management of students and teachers on the school-based drivers and effective teaching and learning of Social Studies in the SHSs included in the study. The results of the analysis using the descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage distribution of responses in the sample) and T-test statistics were presented in Tables 2-5.

Table 2. Summary Results of Descriptive Statistics of Challenges and Management of Students

VARIABLES/CONSTRUCTS	Frequencies/Percentage Response Categories in Sample			Descriptive Statistics	
	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	N = 261	
				Mean	SD
The period allocated for social studies practical is not sufficient for me.	119(45.6)	36(13.8)	106(40.7)	2.9617	1.35819
My social studies teachers teach some aspects of the subjects better than other aspects.	146(55.9)	11(4.2)	104(39.8)	2.7241	1.37020
The school has a Social Studies resources centre.	223(85.4)	25 (9.6)	23(5.0)	1.7011	.91712
I have problems understanding things in social studies class because it is too large.	184(70.5)	10(3.8)	67(25.7)	2.3103	1.32122
My social studies teachers do not complete the syllabus before final examinations.	149(47.1)	4(1.5)	108(41.4)	2.7050	1.50420
The arrangement of benches in my class does not favour free movement.	200(76.7)	5(1.9)	56(21.4)	2.0728	1.28245
The social studies classroom temperature is always cold and makes learning difficult.	162(62.1)	8(3.1)	90(34.5)	2.5785	1.36105

Table 3. Summary results of t-test statistics of students' Challenges and Management

	t	P-value	N=261; df =260		
			Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
				Lower	Upper
Teachers do not motivate me to learn social studies.	28.139	.000	1.87739	1.7460	2.0088
The period on the timetable for learning social studies is adequate.	47.411	.000	3.59770	3.4483	3.7471
My school has adequate social studies reference material for social studies lessons	32.942	.000	2.54406	2.3920	2.6961
During Social Studies practical lessons, we share practical tools.	21.866	.000	2.31801	2.1093	2.5268
My social studies teachers give more group assignments than individual assignments.	37.563	.000	3.09195	2.9299	3.2540
The period allocated for Social Studies practical is not sufficient for me.	35.229	.000	2.96169	2.7961	3.1272
My social studies teachers teach some aspects of the subjects better than other aspects	32.119	.000	2.72414	2.5571	2.8911
The school has a Social Studies resources centre	29.966	.000	1.70115	1.5894	1.8129
I have problems in understanding things in social studies class because it is too large	28.250	.000	2.31034	2.1493	2.4714

My social studies teachers do not complete the syllabus before final examinations	29.052	.000	2.70498	2.5216	2.8883
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Table 4. Summary Results of Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Challenges and Management

Constructs	Mean	SD
I encounter difficulty in addressing all students' challenges in large classes	3.7576	1.09059
The social studies classroom condition is always good and makes learning easy	3.0606	1.22320
The social studies classroom temperature is always cold and makes learning difficult	2.3030	.88335
The social studies classroom condition makes learning enjoyable	3.4545	1.03353
Social studies classroom has good ventilation to promote good health and studies	3.6667	.95743
Each student in social studies class has his /her own desk to promote effective studies	3.6667	1.10868
I find it easy to teach all topics in the Social Studies curriculum	3.0000	1.27475
Management gives adequate money to purchase resources for social studies lessons	2.0909	1.01130
Management organises professional development programs for social studies teachers	2.8485	1.17583
Management is always concerned about large class size and its effect on teaching and learning	3.3636	1.02525
Students are always punctual to class	3.1818	1.13067

Table 5. Summary results of t-test Teachers' Challenges and Management

CONSTRUCTS	T-STATISTICS				
	T	P-values	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
				Lower	Upper
I encounter difficulty in addressing all students' challenges in large classes	19.793	.000	3.75758	3.3709	4.1443
The social studies classroom condition is always good and makes learning easy	14.374	.000	3.06061	2.6269	3.4943
The social studies classroom temperature is always cold and makes learning difficult	14.977	.000	2.30303	1.9898	2.6163
The social studies classroom condition makes learning enjoyable	19.201	.000	3.45455	3.0881	3.8210
Social studies classroom has good ventilation to promote good health and studies	22.000	.000	3.66667	3.3272	4.0062
Each student in social studies class has his /her own desk to promote effective studies	18.999	.000	3.66667	3.2735	4.0598
I find it easy to teach all topics in the Social Studies curriculum	13.519	.000	3.00000	2.5480	3.4520
Management gives adequate money to purchase resources for social studies lessons	11.877	.000	2.09091	1.7323	2.4495
Management organises professional development programs for social studies teachers	13.916	.000	2.84848	2.4316	3.2654
Management is always concerned about large class sizes and its effect on teaching and learning	18.847	.000	3.36364	3.0001	3.7272
Students are always punctual to class	16.166	.000	3.18182	2.7809	3.5827

4. Discussion

4.1. Challenges associated with the teaching and learning of Social Studies in the public senior high schools

This section presents discussions of the results of the research question: What are the challenges associated with the teaching and learning of Social Studies in the public senior

high schools in the Akuapem South and North Districts? The results of the study again revealed that all the five SHSs included in the study have large class sizes (high student enrollment per class) which were above 40 students per class. This could affect the output of the teacher as he/she will find it difficult to individualise the teaching-learning process. Aside from this, large class sizes negatively influence the time the teacher can spend with each individual student in the class. The impact of class size and student-teacher ratio on educational outcomes is among the most researched areas in education [36]. Reducing class size has been found to have academic benefits in all subject areas. Studies published since the mid-1980s showed that classroom behaviour and test scores improve when students are small in classes [37]. The advantages of small classes have been touted by educators throughout modern history [38]. Studies show that overcrowded or large classes are now commonplace in most educational institutions, especially those in the developing world of which Ghana is no exception.

With regard to how large class size affects the quality and effectiveness of teaching, a researcher indicated that; "You cannot set essay questions; it is not practicable; tutorials are impossible; it is counterproductive; you must face the whole class; the interaction is not close enough" [39]. Within the literature on large classrooms in North America and Western Europe, there are issues about the point at which classes become too large and negatively impact education quality. In Western countries, class sizes of 30 are considered large and in need of reduction. In disagreement with this assertion, a similar study was of the view that there are examples of very large classrooms with excellent student learning outcomes and that, this was achieved through differentiated instruction, improved classroom management, and improved teacher morale [38].

Another challenge student faced in their social studies lessons, as revealed in this study was inadequate reference resources. Out of the 261 students who responded to the questionnaires, 124 (47.5%) were in the province of this driver. Research has demonstrated that within schools, it is vital to make provision for resources such as textbooks, notes, learning materials, hand-outs, technology, library facilities and resources available for students to utilize to enhance their academic performance [40]. When students are provided with the necessary tools and equipment, they will be able to acquire a better understanding of academic concepts and how to perform hands-on practicals using the appropriate tools. A similar study supported the findings of this research that schools which are well equipped with relevant educational facilities which comprise instructional materials such as textbooks, libraries and even laboratories do much better in standardised examinations such as grade seven than those which do not have resources [41]. The major factor that ignites teacher effectiveness towards teaching in schools is the availability of instructional materials such as charts, textbooks and syllabi.

However, another argument students from deprived homes or with poor socio-economic backgrounds cannot afford the books and materials required for learning, hence, they are dependent upon the library facilities and fellow students to obtain the books and other materials [40]. Where these helps are not available or ineffective, students learning may be negatively affected. However, warns that the mere availability of materials are not enough. More innovative ways of understanding how schools work and how quality may be improved are the issues [42].

4.2. Management Supports for Social Studies Education in the senior high schools

This sub-section also presents a discussion on the research question: What are the existing management supports for Social Studies Education in the senior high schools in Akuapem South and Akuapem North Districts? The study found that teachers do not receive any form of motivation from management in regard to teaching large class sizes. Twenty-four teachers (52.7%) reported this. The t-test conducted revealed that the subscale scores of teachers teaching large class sizes without any motivation from management were statistically significant ($t= 18.569$, mean difference= 3.723, $p= 0.000$).

Studies showed that administrative support in education is among the most important predictors of teachers' positive perceptions about their work and the effectiveness of education [29, 32]. Developing a clear understanding of what employees are doing and what they expect are among the components of a positive climate [30].

Lack of clarity in rules, regulations and organisational practices in school results in increased work stress and even burnout [33]. The stated policies of the organisations also affect employees' performance. Research further demonstrated that management's ability to create and maintain positive support for teachers is a hallmark of successful schools [43]. Teachers who perceive a positive school climate report feelings of appreciation, respect, commitment, and overall satisfaction cite an increasing body of literature indicating that a positive school climate is "associated with and predictive of academic achievement" [44]. In support of this assertion, researchers contend that teachers believe school leaders can increase school effectiveness by creating an open climate and ensuring appropriate resources are available for instruction [43]. On the other hand, a similar study argues that a climate that impedes the development of collaboration, trust, and transparency deters creativity, transparency, and connectedness among teachers [44].

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study indicated the challenges teachers face in teaching Social Studies in SHSs, the results of the study revealed that all the five SHSs included in the study have large class sizes (high students' enrollment per class) which were above 40 students per class. This affects the output of teachers as they find it difficult to individualise the teaching-learning process. A large class size negatively influences the time the teacher can spend with each individual student in the class. The impact of class size and student-teacher ratio on educational outcomes is among the most researched areas in education and, reducing class size has been found to have academic benefits in all subject areas. The study also revealed that teachers do not receive any form of motivation from management regarding teaching large class sizes. The t-test conducted revealed that the subscale scores of teachers teaching large class size without any motivation from management was statistically significant. Meanwhile, studies show that administrative support in education is among the most important predictors of teachers' positive perceptions about their work and the effectiveness of education and that, developing a clear understanding of what employees are doing and what they expect are among the components of a positive climate.

It is recommended that management should organise refresher courses for social studies teachers on the mode of assessment of students by teachers using diagnostic tools and how to encourage critical thinking among students. The issue of large class size which affects the output of teachers should be addressed at the policy level so that the student-teacher ratio can be eliminated or reduced via the provision of adequate infrastructure and employment of adequate teachers. It is also recommended that Social Studies teachers should be motivated by management. This is necessary because it was discovered during the study that teachers do not receive any form of motivation and resources from management regarding the teaching of large class sizes.

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