

SOCIAL STUDIES CONTENT KNOWLEDGE IMPARTATION ON STUDENTS

Boadu Kankam

Department of Art and Social Sciences Education
University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana

Abstract

The main objective of the study was to find out how Social Studies teachers at the Senior High Schools (SHSs) impact their content knowledge into students in the classroom. To achieve this objective, interview guide and questionnaire were used to elicit the views of respondents. In all, 54 Social Studies teachers were involved in the study. The simple random, cluster and convenient sampling techniques were used to select the respondents for the study. Frequency counts and percentages were used as statistical tools for analyzing the questionnaire data collected, and the data from the interview guide was transcribed, categorized, analyzed and discussed on themes and subthemes that emerged. The findings revealed that majority of the teachers used content knowledge of Social Studies they have acquired to impact in their teaching to develop attitude, skills, values and knowledge in students. Based upon the findings, it was recommended that, there should be courses on Social Studies content so as to develop teachers' knowledge about the subject to enhance effective teaching.

Keywords: knowledge, content, social studies

Introduction

The overall goal of the Ministry of Education is to provide relevant and quality education for all citizens, including the disadvantaged, to enable them acquire skills which will make them functionally literate and productive to facilitate poverty alleviation and promote the rapid socio-economic growth of the country (CRDD, 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 provides cornerstone 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 (NCSS, 2018).

In recent years, teachers' knowledge of the subject matter they teach has attracted increasing attention from policymakers. Programmes such as Social Studies workshops for SHSs Social Studies teachers, are all aimed at providing content-focused professional development intended to improve teachers' content knowledge. Kankam, Bekoe, Ayaaba, Bordoh and Eshun (2014) there are varied conceptions about the scope of content of Social Studies in the Colleges of Education

in Ghana. Final year teacher- trainees conceptualized the content of Social Studies to cover: subject-centred; acquisition of problem solving skills; solving issues that threaten human survival; separated into individual subject areas rather than organised as integrated discipline; development of positive attitudes of students; critical examination of controversial issues; on the critical thinking about important social and political issues; and the key social and cultural situations in the community. The focus on subject-matter knowledge is evidence suggesting that teachers have not made the necessary impact on their teaching and that they lack the essential knowledge for teaching their field of area (Ma, 2019).

Despite this widespread interest and concern, what counts as “subject matter knowledge for teaching” and how it relates to student achievement has remained inadequately specified in past research. A literature read for example, reveals that working in this tradition have typically measured teachers’ knowledge using proxy variables, such as courses taken, degrees attained, or results of basic skills tests. This stands in sharp contrast to another group of education scholars who have begun to conceptualize teachers’ knowledge for teaching differently, arguing that teacher effects on student achievement are driven by teachers’ ability to understand and use subject-matter knowledge to carry out the tasks of teaching (Shulman, 1987).

The National Council for Social Studies (2018) said that, teaching Social Studies powerfully and authentically begins with a deep knowledge and understanding of the subject and its unique goals. Social Studies programs prepare students to identify, understand, and work to solve the challenges facing our diverse nation in an increasingly interdependent world. Education for citizenship should help students acquire and learn to use the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that will prepare them to be competent and responsible citizens throughout their lives. Competent and responsible citizens are informed and thoughtful, participate in their communities, are involved politically, and exhibit moral and civic virtues (NCSS, 2018).

Teacher education, competence, and practice is an important topic, but still there has, at least in the Ghanaian context, been limited research on teachers’ competence as well as performance when it comes to Social Studies as a school subject. Several studies have been directed toward the content and evolution of the national curriculum of Social Studies. Others have been concerned with Social Studies textbooks, while yet others have done research on students attitudes toward and practicing of democratic values in the school setting. To the best of our knowledge, there has been an empirical research exploring the priorities, perspectives, and teaching methods of Social Studies teachers. The conclusion from these different studies is, of course, more nuanced than we are able to express in a few lines, but a general tendency appears to be that Social Studies, in line with other school subjects, has been subject to changing content and intentions based on general trends in school policy. To Clausen, text books, on the other hand, are still limited in their ability to express social and political themes from a non-traditional perspective (Clausen 2017), and teachers are largely unable to depart from text-books and traditional teaching methods.

Ghana's education has gone through many reforms dating back to colonial times to date. All these reforms aim at bringing constant improvements in its availability and relevance of education to the citizenry. In achieving this, the Ministry of Education in Ghana has since the early 1950's modified their entry requirements for admissions into the Colleges of Education. Time was when applicants entered Colleges of Education from standard seven, but this changed to entry after Senior high School. Again, the duration of training was also changed from one year to two years and to three years. These changes in duration spent at the Colleges of Education help to ensure higher content knowledge before and during training.

It is traditionally accepted that for any effective teaching, the teacher should have both the content knowledge and the pedagogy. Teachers' knowledge about the subject matter to be learned or taught and that of content to be covered in the syllabus are very important and when applied well will promote effective teaching and learning. A teacher with deep pedagogical knowledge understands how students construct knowledge and acquire skills and how they develop habits of mind and positive dispositions toward learning. As such, pedagogical knowledge requires an understanding of cognitive, social, and developmental theories of learning and how they apply to students in the classroom. A thorough grounding in college-level subject matter and professional competence in professional practice are necessary for good teaching. This will equip the teacher with assessment tool in order to bridge the gap between assessment and teaching as it is an essential way of creating independent, reflective learners who can plan and assess their own progress (Bordoh, Eshun & Bassaw, 2013)

In Ghana, Social Studies seems to occupy a high profile in the Senior High School curriculum and it is one of the core subjects to be studied at that level. Because of its importance, the government of Ghana is committed to ensuring the provision of high quality Social Studies teachers in our educational system through the Universities in the country. Besides, Social Studies is compulsory at the Junior and Senior High Schools. Personal experience and unverified information seem to point to the fact that most of our graduates from the Senior High Schools display their inability in the needed behavioural change which Social Studies seeks to address. Consistently, negative citizenry behaviours of all sorts are on the increase in the country and one begins to ask if the subject Social Studies is actually achieving its purpose and goals. Social Studies was introduced into Senior High Schools in Ghana and made compulsory in September 2016. It is expected that the nation would have by this time realized some positive behavioural traits among the products of the Senior High School. The question is why is it that the subject is not achieving its intended goals and purpose. Do the teachers have any gap in content?

On the contrary, it is sad to note that despite the goals and purposes of Social Studies, the expected outcomes in its learners after their contact with it in Senior High schools appear unachieved. Many people are putting up behaviours contrary to the goals and objectives of the subject. In the researchers' opinion, Ghanaians are becoming intolerant to national issues, people are becoming more self-centred than thinking about their neighbours, and people are showing apathy to national

development. There is poor attitude to work and above all people are more tribally centred neglecting the idea of Ghana as a nation. The Ghanaian attitude to voting and elections in general are matters of concern. These seem to suggest that Social Studies is not being well taught in our schools. It is this identified gap that has compelled the to find out the content knowledge base of the teachers' in Social Studies in our Senior High Schools and its impact on students learning. The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' content knowledge of Social Studies and its impacts on the students learning. This research is meant to answer the question: How do the contents of Social Studies taught, impact on the students learning?

Research Method

The design for study was descriptive survey. Data collected was analyzed in the form of tables and words. Triangulation was used to test the consistency of findings obtained through different instrument. The population for this study comprised all Social Studies teachers in the Senior High Schools (SHS) in the Western Region of Ghana. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2017), a targeted population is a group of respondents from whom the researchers are interested in collecting information and drawing conclusions. In this present study, the target population comprised all Social Studies teachers teaching the subject in Senior High Schools at Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis in the Western Region of Ghana.

The sample size for the study was fifty-four (54) Social Studies teachers teaching the subject. Sampling method such as random, cluster and convenient sampling techniques were employed by the researchers to select the sample of district, schools and respondents for the study.

Result

Table 1. Frequency responses to the research question

Statements	A	U	D
Problem stated in the Social Studies syllabus	42	8	4
1. for SHS helps in the selection of the right content to be taught in the subject			
The Social Studies teacher makes deliberate	49	2	3
2. efforts to develop certain positive attitudes and values in students when teaching			

The data in table 1 indicate that, 42 (77.7%) respondents agreed that the problem stated in the Social Studies syllabus for SHS help in the selection of the right content to be taught in the subject, 8 (14.8%) were undecided and 4 (7.4%) disagreed; 49 (90.7%) respondents agreed to the statement the Social Studies teacher makes deliberate efforts to develop certain positive attitudes and values in students when teaching, 2 (3.7%) were undecided and 3 (5.5%) disagreed.

Table 3. Analysis on how Social Studies content are taught

To what extent are the following true of the Social Studies teaching.	Very great extent	Great extent	Moderately true	Averagely untrue	Not true
Students' attitudes are being developed by the teacher.	-	-	2	4	2
Students' values are being developed.	-	-	2	4	2
Students' skills are being developed.	-	2	1	3	2
Teacher makes repeated efforts in encouraging in the needed attitudes for students	-	-	2	-	6

The data in Table 2 indicate that, 2 (25%) of the Social Studies teachers moderately made the attempt to teach to develop students' attitudes, 4 (50%) averagely made the attempt to deliberately teach to develop students' attitudes and 2 (25%) did not attempt to teach to develop students' attitudes. It was also revealed that 2 (25%) of the Social Studies teachers were able to develop students skills to a great extent, 1 (12.5%) moderately did that, 3 (37.5%) averagely made the attempt, while 2 (25%) did not attempt to teach to develop teachers skills.

The responses from the interview conducted revealed the following: When this question was posed in what ways will your knowledge in Social Studies help you in your teaching? Most of the respondents said "Yes, once you have knowledge in Social Studies, it will help you to learn certain skills, knowledge and other things. It also entails an aspect of values because a curriculum or syllabus aspect of Social Studies helps the teacher to teach the students certain skills and capabilities. For example, topics like self identity and self consciousness. Although the teacher is naïve in the area of knowledge of the subject, will she/he not be able to build the capabilities of students". Another teacher said "once Social Studies entails a broad spectrum, being a teacher, if

I am able to get the needed skills and knowledge, I think I will be able to teach because there are some areas you have to do a lot of research and if you are very naive and a novice, I think it will be a great challenge, but if you have a broad spectrum in terms of knowledge, it will help you in other social issues. It will help you to teach the subject very well". The teacher further lamented that "knowledge I have acquired in Social Studies helps me to relate all the issues related to real life situations, in the sense that it makes you to relate the topic to situations to the understanding of the children". A respondent had this to say: I did not do Social Studies nor did social science but my profession as a Rev. Minister relating to the people from all walks of life and then the liberal studies that I did at the University also helps me to deal with problems in the society. My knowledge and experiences as a minister and liberal studies helps me to teach Social Studies. With experience I share what I have experienced with the students.

When this question was also posed to the respondents in teaching Social Studies, do you consciously develop attitude, values, knowledge and skills in the students? Most of teachers said exactly, because students have already conceived certain things in mind whether good or bad, *we will take advantage to educate them and that calls for attitudinal change.* One of the teachers said *"it is something that I keep hammering on or at times I use role play. I spend time to argue sometimes and even ask them to vote. Sometimes the majority might be wrong because of their preconceived ideas sometimes; I use that to change their mind from that attitude."* Another teacher also said *"I think yes, because in teaching, it garnishes that line, but then changing of attitudes in students is difficult because of even how the student see the subject, so it is an aspect of my teaching to change the behavioural aspects of the student"*. Another teacher indicated that *"I give them so many research works and upon their findings I indicate what is relevant to the individual students and the impact to the society"*. Another respondent had this to say:

Through the topics we teach the students because one of the topics works on their social values and at times in the course of teaching, students might misbehave so, I have to teach them the right thing like attitude, skills and value

"I consciously inculcate in student the right attitude, skills and values."

What is your view about this? When teaching a Social Studies topic 'Science and Technology' the teacher will be concerned with

The meaning of Science and Technology

What constitutes Science and Technology?

How the study of Science can be applied in Technology?

The advantages of Science and Technology.

All the teachers said *“How can the study of science be applied in technology? “They further said social studies is not having any bearing with science and technology”*. Another teacher said *social studies curriculum should contain topics that can change the mind set of the learners and can right wrong in the society*.

This question was also put before the teachers by the researchers. When teaching Social Studies topic ‘institution of marriage’ at SHS the teacher will be concerned with

How to help people to solve the problem of selecting a future partner?

What constitutes the preparation that ought to be made before getting married?

Meaning of marriage

The types of marriages we have in Ghana.

All the respondents said *“what constitutes the preparation that ought to be made before getting married”? They further lamented as problem solving subject it was an ideal to have this topic in Social Studies curriculum. It will help the learners to have insight into what constitutes the preparation that ought to be made before getting married. And also to have right attitudes and values towards marriage*.

Conclusion

Based on the findings it can be concluded that many teachers in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis used content knowledge in Social Studies to impact into students’ acceptable attitudes, values and skills during teaching and learning. Again, achieving good West African Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) results give teachers some fame and reward and so teachers are poised to achieve these rewards rather than developing the learners’ attitudes, values, skills and giving them knowledge which will benefit the society and the nation at large. Since content knowledge is vital to good teaching, there should be courses on Social Studies content so as to develop teachers’ knowledge about the subject to enhance effective teaching. Questions in Social Studies should emphasize on how to address the problems of human survival. West African Examination Certificate (WAEC) style of setting questions should be such that students will apply what they have acquired in class rather than reproducing what is in the textbooks.

There should be periodic seminars for Social Studies teachers to refresh the minds of those who have been outside the University for a long time so that they will be abreast with new information about the subject. Colleges of Education should restructure their programmes to suit content methodology of Social Studies for effective teaching and learning. Social Studies Association should organise in-service training for newly trained graduates from the Universities and Colleges on the content of Social Studies to enhance effective teaching.

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