



Case Study

Investigating Students' Preferred Instructional Methods for Teaching Social Studies in a Selected Senior High School in Afadzato South District, Ghana

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Received: 13 September 2022; **Revised:** 26 September 2022; **Accepted:** 28 September 2022

Abstract: The purpose of this study was to identify students' preferred instructional methods for teaching Social Studies in a selected Senior High School in Afadzato South District of Ghana. This study employed a concurrent triangulation mixed-method strategy. A multi-stage sampling strategy was used to select 78 form three students. Purposive sampling was used to select 3 Social Studies teachers. Self-developed observation and interview guides were used in collecting the data. Self-developed questionnaires were also used in collecting data from only students. However, both teachers and students participated in the study through the interview and classroom observation in order to ascertain an in-depth understanding of students' responses to the questionnaires. Validity and reliability were established by piloting the research instruments in one of the senior high schools in Afadzato South District. Besides, the research instruments were given to other colleague researchers to review before the final data were collected. Also, concepts were explained to students for clarity before responding to the questions. The study's findings revealed that students prefer to learn and be taught Social Studies in a variety of ways. Students also prefer learner-centred strategies to teacher-centred methods. It was concluded that Social Studies objectives will be attained via students' preferred methods of instruction. The study recommended that teachers must alternate their teaching methods to meet students' preferences, to enable them to develop positive responses to Social Studies in order to have a vibrant Social Studies programme, with students actively involved in achieving the objectives of Social Studies.

Keywords: Social Studies, students, teachers, preferences, method

1. Introduction

1.1 The background

For Ghana to keep pace with the holistic growth of the twenty-first century, it must prioritize Social Studies since it can inculcate the necessary skills for a diverse, competitive workforce as well as critical thinkers, problem solvers, active and responsible citizens (Boadu, 2016; Yalley, 2017; Ministry of Education, 2012; Mensah, 2020). Social Studies provides a platform for learners to make new and unique connections through self-assessment, teamwork, inquiry and exploration (Bariham, 2019; Yalley, 2017; Mensah, 2020). These are specified norms in democratic societies to aid in

the development of youth's knowledge and skills and in making well-informed decisions for the general good (Binfo, 2020; Yalley, 2017; Prasetya et al., 2020; Mensah, 2020). The Ghanaian Constitution envisages citizens acquiring information, attitudes and values that would ensure the sustainability of constitutional ideals in a democratic system (The Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992; Mensah, 2020). Ghana's educational system tries to teach students morals and values to prepare them to grasp the ideas associated with good citizenship through the Social Studies curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2018a; 2018b; 2020).

Social Studies has the mandate of instilling information, skills and attitudes in learners for them to be concerned, engaged, critical thinkers, problem solvers, and responsible citizens in their various jurisdictions (Binfo, 2020; Odundo et al., 2018; Bordoh et al., 2018). The use of appropriate teaching and learning methodologies and the cultivation of favourable preferences, perceptions, and attitudes towards Social Studies among students will help the discipline achieve its goals (Shifflet & Hunt, 2019). On the other hand, students' unmet and improper preferences, unfavourable attitudes, and incorrect perceptions of the discipline obstruct its goals and objectives (Sivakumar, 2018). The unfavourable or negative preferences, attitudes, and perceptions of students toward the Social Studies discipline originate from the methods of instruction used by Social Studies teachers (Oyibe & Nnamani, 2015; Sivakumar, 2018).

Studies (Mensah, 2020; Alazzi & Aldowan, 2011) have identified problems affecting the teaching and learning of Social Studies. They encompass teachers' lack of enthusiasm for teaching Social Studies; teachers' inability to provide necessary assistance on other fractious topics; teachers' failure to use a variety of instructional strategies to reach students' understandings; inadequate teaching and learning materials in Social Studies classrooms; and Social Studies teachers' inability to bring in other experts. Besides, students sometimes see Social Studies as boring (Bordoh et al., 2018; Molenje et al., 2017). Sometimes, this emanates from a scarcity of well-trained and capable teachers in the discipline (Mensah, 2020; Mensah & Frimpong, 2020; Sivakumar, 2018). Lack of understanding of topics, lack of process skills training, avoidance of sensitive problems, and poor material depth by certain Social Studies teachers are some of the primary variables that affect the teaching and learning of Social Studies (Retnowati et al., 2018; Mensah, 2020). Nonetheless, Social Studies should be taught by adopting methods that are preferred by students to enable the attainment of the objectives of Social Studies. This is because the study of Social Studies in Senior High Schools in Ghana, is to promote citizenship education, geared towards problem-solving, critical thinking, etc. (Ministry of Education, 2018b; Ghana Education Sector Medium-term Development Plan, 2018-2021; Mensah, 2020; Mensah & Frimpong, 2020).

1.2 The problem

Research on Social Studies instruction suggests a decline in students' interest in Social Studies. For example, Lawson (2003) polled 100 tenth-grade students and 100 twelfth-grade students to find out how they felt about different study topics in the United States of America. Among English and Mathematics, Social Studies received the lowest score in the study. In Ghana, Mensah (2020) conducted a survey that demonstrated students exhibit a lackadaisical attitude towards Social Studies instruction, with the view that, Social Studies is a simple subject and easy to pass and hence requires less attention than English and Mathematics. These could be attributed to instructional methods used by Social Studies teachers (Oyibe & Nnamani, 2015; Mensah, 2020; Mensah & Frimpong, 2020). As a result, students are less interested in learning Social Studies because they perceive it to be less relevant (Mensah, 2020; Mensah & Frimpong, 2020). These have the potential to affect students' grades and their achievement of Social Studies objectives.

Consequently, this research sought to investigate students' preferred instructional methods for teaching Social Studies by specifically focusing on students in Afadzato South District in the Volta region of Ghana where the researchers have personally observed students' reluctance to Social Studies learning.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to assess students' preferred instructional methods for teaching Social Studies in a selected senior high school in the Afadzato South District of Ghana. The study, therefore, seeks to answer the following research questions:

- i. What are students' preferred methods for Social Studies instruction?
- ii. Which instructional methods are mostly used by Social Studies teachers in class?

iii. What possible factors affect students' preferred methods for Social Studies instruction?

2. Literature review

2.1 Understanding the role of Social Studies and how it should be taught

Every teacher in the classroom, including Social Studies teachers, aspires to provide for their students' comprehension and needs during an instructional session. This is difficult, however, because of the complexities involved with different levels of physical development, skills, talents, behaviours, attitudes, emotions, and social orientations among students (Oyibe & Nnamani, 2015; Lilian et al., 2019). The Social Studies curriculum aims to develop learners' dispositions for practicing tolerance, collaboration, and decision-making abilities in a variety of settings, including the family, school and society, as productive and effective citizens (Ganira et al., 2018). This echo (Oyibe & Nnamani, 2015) positions that Social Studies as a field, if well-programmed, has the potential to aid in the resolution of societal problems that plague developing countries, where old standards are rapidly loosened with no substitution for replacement.

Social Studies plays a critical role in the acquisition and development of skills, effective values, and learning outcomes (Boadu, 2016; Yalley, 2017; Mensah, 2020; Bariham, 2019), which necessitates that, the subject be properly taught in order to instill in students the skills of locating information from print media, textbooks, libraries, newspapers, as well as from resource people and community resources (Bariham et al., 2019; Seow et al., 2019). In a world of conflicting ideologies, values, and attitudes, Social Studies has the responsibility of measurably contributing to the development of confidence, hope, and a positive self-image in learners as it assists young people in developing competence that allows them to deal with, and, to some extent, to manage the physical and social forces of the world in which they live (Boadu, 2016; Mensah & Frimpong, 2020; Kissling & Bell, 2020; Yalley, 2017). It also aids in instilling in young people a sense of optimism for the future and confidence in their ability to tackle social problems, as well as developing accountability, peace, and appreciation for individual rights and societal cohesiveness (Sivakumar, 2018; Huck, 2019; Farisi, 2016).

However, students frequently regard Social Studies as a dull and monotonous subject (Mensah, 2020). Not all, students do not recognize the significance of Social Studies in their daily lives (Sivakumar, 2018). This could be due to the fact that Social Studies subject is either boring, dull, or uninteresting (Mensah, 2020), or that Social Studies teachers' instructional methods for delivering content fail to inspire or actively engage students in learning topics in Social Studies (Oyibe & Nnamani, 2015). It is worth noting that Social Studies, as an inter-disciplinary subject, should be taught using a variety of instructional strategies that encourage active engagement of learners or students in the teaching and learning process (An, 2017). That is, when students dominate Social Studies instructional activities, they will be able to reason critically about their own assumptions and the world in which they live, allowing them to no longer be forced to accept their lot blindly, but rather learn ways to contribute to the dynamics (Sivakumar, 2018). This means that to promote value-based education in the Social Studies curriculum, effective instructional methods must be used to instill knowledge in students so that they can fit into their environments and cultures (Lilian et al., 2019), as well as be critical thinkers and problem solvers (Sahin et al., 2010).

2.2 Understanding teachers' ability to deliver Social Studies content, as well as their knowledge of the methods and skills involved

A teacher's technique selection should include knowledge acquisition, skill development, understanding, and broader traits for students. Given that Social Studies is learner-centred, teachers should also focus on teaching students how to engage with the world around them in a more interactive and participative way (Di Biase, 2019). Teachers need to be able to use appropriate teaching techniques that are learner-centred rather than teacher-centred. Small group debating, problem solving, scaffolding, and role playing are some of the best examples of how this can be done in schools (Kissling & Bell, 2020). If Social Studies curriculum instructional methods are used, learners are more likely to engage in group discussions, debate, and the generation of new ideas for developing social integration and the demonstration of nonviolent ways to handle and resolve disputes in society (Lilian et al., 2019; Meziobi & Meziobi,

2016).

Effective teaching approaches affect the learning process, enhancing learners' achievement in sustaining and reinforcing competencies for long-term development (Lilian et al., 2019; Di Biase, 2019). For instance, a study conducted by Kuş (2014) on learner-centred methodologies found that poor instructional approaches in teaching Social Studies decrease the real implementation of knowledge, abilities, and attitudes in learners. The study further elaborates that low-quality educational systems, pedagogical weaknesses among teachers, demand for the curriculum, assessment challenges, and infrastructure impair the implementation of Social Studies. Also, inconsistencies between what students learn in class and their behaviour appear to stem from the instructional methodologies used by teachers (Prasetya et al., 2020). Effective learner-centred techniques enable learners to make appropriate choices for dealing with the negative peer pressure that may develop during the instructional management (Akin et al., 2017).

According to Renowati et al. (2018), character development necessitates proper pedagogies and reinforcements to connect learners to multiple concepts, skills, and themes. Teachers must use appropriate instructional strategies to instill value-based education in the Social Studies curriculum so that students can become responsible citizens (Lilian et al., 2019). This is in keeping with Odundo et al.'s (2018) argument that proper instructional approaches improve learners' confidence in learning. Social Studies teachers must be up-to-date on the substance and teaching methods of their subject. This is because when Social Studies instructional approaches are linked to content, memorization and irrelevant information and concepts are reduced (An, 2017). Students are able to understand the value of Social Studies and make accurate judgments about what Social Studies is (Kissling & Bell, 2020; Prasetya et al., 2020; Oyibe & Nnamani, 2015).

Due to the incorrect application of instructional approaches by Social Studies teachers in teaching and learning processes, students consider either undermining or rejecting the subject outright (Kissling & Bell, 2020; An, 2017; Di Biase, 2019). Teachers often use the lecture style, assignments and traditional assessments as teaching tools (Di Biase, 2019). Nevertheless, lectures, textbooks, and assignments appear to dominate instruction without motivating students to learn. Studies show that when a diversity of teaching approaches are used, students are more interested in the subject (Adeyemi, 2016; An, 2017; Huck, 2019; Malik, 2018; Namamba & Rao, 2017).

Teachers are expected to connect the curriculum to student's personal interests in order to arouse their interest in the discipline. This necessitates a variety of teaching strategies, such as self-directed learning, cooperative learning, and role playing (Oyibe & Nnamani, 2015; Namamba & Rao, 2017; Di Biase, 2019). Self-directed teaching and learning entail engaging students in learning activities that allow them to use their imagination and intuition (Nzima, 2016; Poznanski et al., 2018; Prasetya et al., 2020). As a result, self-directed learning has the potential to improve optimal interaction between and among Social Studies students, fostering effective decision-making when debating and analysing societal issues (Adeyemi, 2016; Meziobi & Meziobi, 2016).

Students who engage in self-directed learning make connections between new and old concepts or facts. It also assists students to construct their own knowledge based on their social and cultural experiences, as well as historical and geographical contexts (Di Biase, 2019; Teo, 2006). The cooperative learning strategy is a popular educational technique for small groups of students (Oyibe & Nnamani, 2015). Students are expected to help, discuss, and dispute with one another in cooperative learning (Shifflet & Hunt, 2019; Oyibe & Nnamani, 2015; Lilian et al., 2019). Through cooperative learning, students can study, practice, and live the attitudes and behaviours that reflect the ideals of Social Studies education (Huck, 2019). Using cooperative learning strategies necessitates students' being active learners (Huck, 2019). Some instructional methods can only be utilized to achieve a few specific goals, while others can accomplish multiple goals at the same time. For instance, the use of questions in the delivery of the lecture awakens students' curiosity and encourages them to learn more (Oyibe & Mbang, 2013).

According to studies, lecture methods (Sivakumar, 2018), whole-class discussion methods (Seow et al., 2019), and teachers requiring students to read textbooks and complete tasks (Meziobi & Meziobi, 2016) are all used in the classroom. The Social Studies topic requires some pedagogical adjustments to incorporate outcome-based learning rather than a theoretical grasp of concepts, i.e., a content-based curriculum. Despite a plethora of research findings, only lecture-based instructional methods are mostly used in Social Studies teaching and learning (Meziobi & Meziobi, 2016). Teachers must use techniques for selecting teaching methods that are aligned with the content to be provided or the skills to be instilled or inculcated in students during the teaching and learning process (Kanon & Kafanabo, 2021).

2.3 Teachers' understanding of how to select and use instructional resources

Poor conditions and a lack of awareness of the educational materials given can hinder learner performance as well as teacher competence (Altinyelken, 2011). In a study titled "An Investigation on Teaching Materials Utilized in Social Studies Lessons in Turkey", Saglam (2011) found that 126 (87.1 percent) of 145 respondents said they used modules and books to teach Social Studies and for tests and examination preparation. In a study titled "The State of Social Studies Teacher Preparation in the United States", Bittman et al. (2017) found that most (64 percent) of Social Studies teachers had difficulty teaching while using relevant teaching Social Studies aids; they used textbooks of their own interests to teach. These studies raise concerns about how teachers use teaching materials to promote cooperation, reflection, building on past knowledge, and the encouragement of activities that help students grasp Social Studies concepts. Therefore, Social Studies teachers should use appropriate teaching and learning tools that make learning permanent, excite students, and provide an experience (Meziobi & Meziobi, 2016). It is worth noting that instructional materials play an important role in guaranteeing teacher efficiency and student active engagement throughout class (Sivakumar, 2018). The chalk-and-talk method is not always the best way to teach Social Studies (Heafner, 2018).

2.4 Understanding teachers' assessment competence and knowledge

Every teacher must gain comprehensive knowledge and skills in assessment and evaluation methodologies. Through the use of assessment, teachers must assess a wide range of skills, knowledge, understanding, and competencies. Assessment is required to validate all of the methods used in the delivery of a lesson (Kitta & Tilya, 2010). According to Desimone and Pak (2017), method selection should be guided by a criterion that indicates which methodology is best for measuring competency holistically, such as one that incorporates theory and practice. Because formative evaluation is so important, it's important to keep a detailed record of each learner's progress (Huck, 2019). In a study, Poznanski et al. (2018) discovered evidence of teachers' skills to employ instructional assessment in class to develop foreknowledge, academic knowledge, and lifetime learning. They found that more than three-quarters of the students had no prior knowledge of learning tasks. Students participated in the production of meaning and successfully absorbed the lessons after teachers involved them in the construction of meaning and utilized social constructivist-inspired activity reflections to repeat the teachings.

In Social Studies, the most frequently suggested and effective assessment technique looks at a broader variety of learners' knowledge and skills in order to grasp multiple social activities (Sivakumar, 2018). In the New Juaben Municipality in Ghana's Eastern Region, Sawyer and Myers (2018) found that teachers prefer to do formative assessments using teacher-centred assessment approaches. To put it another way, teachers should be knowledgeable about many stages of teaching and how evaluation may be utilized to assist students in learning more quickly when knowledge is presented in a structured manner. This is because assessment provides hope for the efficacy of all procedures carried out during instructional approaches.

3. Study methods

3.1 Research design

The methods and procedures employed in this study were aimed at accumulating and analysing evidence to aid in comprehending students' preferred instructional methods for teaching Social Studies. This study employed a concurrent triangulation mixed-method strategy. Specifically, a combination of a qualitative research approach informed by the interpretative paradigm, which allows for a focus on words rather than just frequencies and distributions during data collection and analysis, and a quantitative approach informed by descriptive survey design was used. The mixed method approach was chosen because the qualitative approach allows knowledge to be linked to context, theories to be linked to practice, and presumptions to be linked to actual experience (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Sanga, 2016), while the quantitative approach prevents manipulation of data variables. The quantitative technique assists in examining variable relationships so that data obtained can be examined using statistical procedures (Orodho et al., 2016).

3.2 Sampling methods

Multi-stage sampling was adopted for the study. One school in the Afadzato South District was chosen for the study using convenient sampling. The name of the school has been withheld to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Teachers who specialized in Social Studies, such as Bachelor of Education Social Studies degree holders, were purposively selected as study participants for interview. This was to ensure that they possessed adequate knowledge and experience in the delivery of Social Studies content. According to Ibengwe (2013), a lack of pedagogical competency among instructors in structuring classroom teaching affects teaching and learning. Second, the experience was deemed an important characteristic by the researchers. Hence, three Social Studies teachers, captioned (T1, T2 and T3), with at least two years of classroom experience were chosen using purposive sampling.

As a result, they were assumed to be well-equipped with educational backgrounds and expertise in Social Studies and capable of contributing useful data to the research. That is, purposive sampling was also used for selecting senior high school form three students because they had been in school for a longer period of time compared to form two and form one. As a result, they would be better able to provide accurate and reliable feedback on their preferences of instructional methods for teaching Social Studies. In addition to the teachers, probability sampling, specifically, systematic random sampling was employed to select 78 form three student respondents using the formula: $n = N/1 + N(\alpha)^2$. Where n = sample size, N = sample frame, α = confidence level. With a 90-percent confidence level (0.10), the sample size (n) is estimated as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Sample size

Units	Sample Frame (N)	$N(\alpha)^2$	$1 + N(\alpha)^2$	$N/1 + N(\alpha)^2$	n
Population of form three students	362	3.62	4.62	362/4.62	78

Source: Authors' construct, (2022)

Furthermore, five students from each of the three selected teacher respondents' classrooms, totaling 15 students captioned (ST1-ST15) were purposefully selected for interview. Teachers' and students' demographic data were restricted to maintain anonymity and allow them to respond objectively to the research questions.

3.3 Data collection instrument

The data were gathered using self-developed observation and interview guides. Again, self-developed questionnaires were used in collecting data from only students. However, both teachers and students took part in the study through interviews and classroom observations in order to gain a thorough insight into the students' questionnaire responses. The study instruments' validity and reliability were validated by piloting them in one of the senior high schools in the Afadzato South District. Furthermore, the study instruments were given to colleague researchers for review before the final data were collected.

3.4 Data collection procedure

The convergent parallel mixed method approach was the general framework for data collection. Both qualitative and quantitative data were concurrently collected. Instead of relying just on self-reported behaviour from interviews, the researchers employed classroom observation using an observation guide to examine actual instructional methods and how senior high school instructors used them as well as students' preferences, attitudes, and perceptions towards those methods of instruction. To guarantee adequate participation, the questionnaires were distributed in the selected teachers' classes during Social Studies lessons. In order to eliminate ambiguity and increase the reliability of feedback, the researchers spent time explaining specific concepts to the students in order to ensure proper responses. Students were informed that the study was not a graded test, nor was it intended to popularize any teacher or student, but rather

was intended to provide reliable feedback on their preferred instructional methods for teaching Social Studies, with no consequences or penalties. Students' individual evaluations of teachers were likewise discouraged in this study. Students were given the option to respond to multiple items in the questionnaire where necessary. A table was used to present the data. Ratings of 50% and above were regarded as highly favoured, while ratings of less than 50% were rated as low preference. The head of the school and the head of the department of Social Sciences were both approached for permission and consent. Participation in the data collection was entirely voluntary.

3.5 Data processing and analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data from the interviews. The data from the classroom observation was analysed using the content analysis method. Version 20 of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse quantitative data. The data was concurrently analysed and interpreted to project the preferred instructional methods for teaching Social Studies among senior high school students. To ensure that the interpretation was consistent with the data and to make the data comprehensive in more abstract patterns, techniques such as the repeated reading of data terms, noting patterns, comparisons, and inter-subjective agreement were used.

4. Results and discussions

Table 2. Instructional Methods Preferred by Students

Instructional Methods Preferred	Res	N	Agree (%)
Active learning	ST	78	88%
Cooperative	ST	78	80%
Demonstration	ST	78	69%
Discussion	ST	78	71%
Dramatization/role play	ST	78	68%
Expository	ST	78	49%
Field trips	ST	78	89%
Games and simulation	ST	78	77%
Individualized	ST	78	74%
Lecture	ST	78	41%
Note-taking method	ST	78	49%
Project method	ST	78	57%
Question and answer	ST	78	53%
Self-directed	ST	78	79%
Story-telling	ST	78	64%
Student presentation	ST	78	59%
Technology (video, audio, etc.)	ST	78	76%
Using graphics	ST	78	81%

Source: Field Survey (2022)

Where ST = Students, Res = Respondents' category, N = Total number of respondents

Table 3. Students' Responses to Instructional Methods Mostly Used by Teachers

Instructional Methods Mostly Used	Res	N	Agree (%)
Active learning	ST	78	50%
Cooperative	ST	78	49%
Demonstration	ST	78	21%
Discussion	ST	78	51%
Dramatization/role play	ST	78	3%
Expository	ST	78	45%
Field trips	ST	78	1%
Games and simulation	ST	78	1%
Individualized	ST	78	30%
Lecture	ST	78	81%
Note-taking method	ST	78	9%
Project method	ST	78	16%
Question and answer	ST	78	57%
Self-directed	ST	78	49%
Story-telling	ST	78	2%
Student presentation	ST	78	26%
Technology (video, audio, etc.)	ST	78	1%
Using graphics	ST	78	1%

Source: Field Survey (2022)

Where ST = Students, Res = Respondents' category, N = Total number of respondents

The results presented in Table 2 and Table 3 above were obtained from students' responses to the questionnaire. The survey results aligned with the questionnaire's open-ended questions. Discussion of results from open-ended questions, classroom observation and interviews with students and teachers were presented concurrently with the outcome of the statistical data obtained from the questionnaires.

4.1 Research question 1: What are students' preferred methods for Social Studies instruction?

The objective of this research question was to ascertain students' preferred instructional methods for teaching Social Studies. Table 2 and Table 3 above are illustrations of students' responses.

The study results in Table 2 reveal that students appreciate a variety of methods in teaching Social Studies. According to the findings, students prefer field trips (89%) cooperating on project work (80%), and being actively involved in material delivery (88%). These indicate that students prefer their teachers to serve as facilitators or guides in

the delivery of Social Studies content rather than as authoritative figures. This is supported by teacher interviews, which revealed that students prefer a variety of methods for delivering Social Studies. According to two of the interviewees:

“Students invariably prefer group presentations, group discussion, and methods that make them actively involved in the teaching and learning process”. Interviewee T1, February 11, 2022.

“By using multiple methods such as the question-and-answer method, cooperative learning, whole class or group discussion method, students can demonstrate assistance to one another towards the accomplishment of set goals, promote awareness of differences among groups and enhance reflection on the stress of working within the group, which fosters skills in listening to ensure effective speaking within a group”. Interviewee T3, February 18, 2022.

The assertions of interviewees T1 and T2 are corroborated by the classroom observation where students were actively involved in the few occasions that teachers varied teaching methods, especially whole-class and small-group discussions in the delivery of their lesson objectives. This is in line with Shifflet and Hunt (2019), who indicated that the discussion method plays a vital role in enhancing appropriate interaction by nurturing the capacity of learners. A teacher adds that:

“Students do not like it when they are not allowed to contribute in class because it makes the class boring and many of them will sleep off.” Interviewee T2, February 15, 2022.

This is a confirmation of students’ preference for the discussion method (71%) as indicated in Table 2 as well as one of the most widely used methods of teaching by teachers (51%) as indicated in Table 3. This corresponded to students’ replies from the interview, who agreed that whether Social Studies will be boring or exciting depends on the teacher who teaches the subject. To the students, it is boring when a teacher does not vary his or her teaching methods and repeatedly does the talking alone, without examples, without asking questions, or without introducing a few jokes, but rather gets annoyed at everything and frequently asks them to go and read their pamphlets or textbooks. They went on to say that when the teacher does not establish an environment that encourages students to ask questions, the lesson becomes uninteresting. During the interview, some students mentioned the following:

“For me, I normally doze off when the teacher is talking plenty and does not allow us “students” to talk or contribute” ST5, February 21, 2022.

“I pay more attention when students are involved in the teaching-learning process. At least it helps me to hear a variety of opinions on a particular point or issue, as well as a variety of voices... The dynamism in class makes it interesting”. ST1, February 21, 2022.

“Whenever we have group presentations, I become excited because I always want to participate in the presentation... That alone boosts my confidence level as well as improves my expression abilities” ST15, February 21, 2022.

Sometimes when a teacher asks a question and nobody knows, he teaches by explaining so many concepts as if he is lecturing... That also enables me to know certain things I have never had an experience with. ST7, February 21, 2022.

This gives the sense that in order to have a vibrant, active, and entertaining classroom, Social Studies as a discipline must be taught, utilizing diverse methods. These findings are in line with the assertion that a lively class, using a variety of methodologies, can achieve the Social Studies program’s objectives, instilling critical thinking, active citizenship, and civic responsibility (Ministry of Education, 2012; Mensah, 2020; Ganira et al., 2018; Kissling & Bell, 2020). The results also support Sivakumar’s assertion (2018) that teaching and learning should be more specific

regarding strategies that enable students to be aware of facts, rules, and action sequences. In order to be well-suited in their particular jurisdictions, the majority of students claimed that they require several approaches that enable them to move beyond mere recognition, knowledge, and comprehension to application, synthesis, and analysis. The following were noted from the interview:

“Social Studies should be taught in a practical way by using videos, pictures, and other audio-visuals to arouse our interest... I think Social Studies should have a studio or a laboratory for that”. ST10, February 21, 2022.

According to the students, field trips (89%), dramatization (68%), as in Table 2 and as per their responses in the interview, going into the community to educate the locals about the effects of child labour, certain cultural practices, and morally accepted standards of behaviour, as well as the need for everyone to take responsibility for their personal and societal development, are among the students’ top priorities. They also seek to educate school dropouts who are likely uninformed about adolescent behaviour, personal hygiene, sex education, and teenage pregnancy, among other topics, so that citizens are properly informed for the common benefit. The following are some of the comments made by students in an interview:

“I think we, as students, who learn Social Studies, should be allowed to go to town for some sensitization to educate people on certain things... Some parents are still irresponsible enough to refuse to take care of their children... Some of them compel their girl children to fornicate to cater for themselves and their families, and they see nothing wrong with that”. ST9, February 21, 2022.

“Some people still practice child labour... You see, our school does not have a fence wall, so many natives walk through our school to go to the farm... Just recently, when we resumed, one woman made her daughter carry some loads from the farm that were beyond the weight and strength of her daughter... This girl was severely crying until they got to our school kitchen premises, where one of our cooks instructed the woman to take the load off the daughter’s head... So, she did, went home and came back for her daughter’s load... I think people like that woman still need education relating to child labour” ST11, February 21, 2022.

According to the students, individual educational methods that aid in providing appropriate information to students enable them to identify their emotional, social, and intellectual needs this is represented by 74% of students’ responses in Table 2. Though teachers do not mostly use individualized teaching methods as indicated by 30% in Table 3, the students believe that Social Studies plays an important role in their lives because it allows them to learn more about themselves and others. It also allows individuals to develop confidence, which allows them to reject some cultural practices that are no longer relevant. It also allows individuals to make decisions about their own social, emotional, physical, and psychological growth and how to deal with the problems that come with it. This corresponds to one of the teacher’s responses:

“Indeed, with individual learning, it enables the teacher to realize the uniqueness of individual students with respect to specific traits, abilities, as well as potentials and therefore facilitate smooth teaching and learning, and developing in students, a sense of confidence, and balance their emotions.” T3, February 18, 2022.

These are in keeping with Prasetya et al.’s assertion (2020) that individualized training is tailored to the needs and skills of individual students. This implies that teaching approaches that prevent students from thinking independently of their teachers and the content of their textbooks should be avoided. As a result, teaching and learning practices that deny students the ability to become conscious of their own learning, critical thinking, and self-driven patterns of teaching and meaning from the content should be relegated to the background (Borich, 2011; Ganira et al., 2018). This is consistent with Stahl (1994), who believed that students may acquire, practice, and live attitudes and behaviours related to Social Studies goals. He went on to say that cooperative learning encourages students to be active rather than passive, which improves their academic performance and social interaction abilities. This is consistent with the beliefs of Shifflet and

Hunt (2019) and Di Biase (2019) that self-directed learning, cooperation, role-playing, and creativity are necessary for effective teaching and learning. Borich (2011) claims that self-directed learning allows pupils to use their creativity and intuition abilities to learn. As a result, he proposes that students be required to take learning as a personal duty, with content beyond what is provided to enable them to reason, solve issues, and become critical thinkers. According to him, students should be involved in project-based learning tactics as well as varied instructional methodologies. When questioned about the importance of project-based techniques, cooperative and self-directed learning for teaching Social Studies, teachers stated that:

“Project-based methods, cooperative learning, and self-directed learning enable students to develop the capacity to solve societal problems”. Interviewee T1, February 11, 2022.

“Project-based methods, cooperative learning, and self-directed learning enable students to portray attitudes that reflect the goals of Social Studies... As we all know, Ghana’s problems are attitudinal. Therefore, when students misbehave, the head of the school will question the impact of Social Studies on their lives”. T3, February 18, 2022.

These are in line with the assertion by students’ responses who indicated that instructional methods like self-directed learning (75%) as in Table 2, allow them to make connections with familiar and new ideas, resolve their doubts and uncertainties, and amend old ideas with new ones. It also allows individuals to develop self-confidence, which allows them to reject some cultural behaviours that are no longer relevant. These are in conformity with a student’s response in an interview:

“For instance, per the knowledge, I acquired in Social Studies, I have been able to resist some treatment in society because I am now privy to my rights... Some of these rights, I learned them on my own while I was equally taught in class”. ST4, February 21, 2022.

This is in agreement with the assertion that self-directed learning allows students to make decisions about their own social, emotional, physical, and psychological growth as well as how to deal with problems (Sivakumar, 2018; Farisi, 2016; Oyibe & Nnamani, 2015; Namamba & Rao, 2017; Di Biase, 2019). This allows the learner to clarify uncertainties and traditional views. Students also indicated that self-directed learning allows them to engage in peer negotiations, discussions, and explanations of key subjects, allowing them to become critical thinkers.

4.2 Research question 2: Which instructional methods are mostly used by Social Studies teachers in class?

The objective of this research question was to elicit from students, the methods of instruction that are mostly used by Social Studies Students.

It is worth reiterating that, the results of the questionnaire matched those of the interviews and classroom observations, which revealed a low preference for traditional ways of teaching Social Studies such as the lecture method as represented by 41% in Table 2, though, that is mostly used by teachers (81%) as indicated in Table 3. They also do not prefer the note-taking method as represented by 49% in Table 2. According to the researcher’s observations in the classroom, traditional methods such as lectures, note-taking, questioning, story-telling, expository, and explanatory methods made interactions between teachers and students passive without active student participation in the Social Studies subject’s teaching and learning process. These may be attributed to the reasons why they are not mostly used by teachers, thus, story-telling (2%), and note-taking (9%), per the students’ responses in Table 3. However, teachers mostly use the lecture method (81%) as in Table 3, which is attributed to the fact that it enables teachers to determine their own pace. This is in line with Seow et al. (2019), who believe that the lecture method is a teacher-centred technique because the pace and cadence of the teacher are determined by the teacher. The following is what a teacher admitted:

“Though the lecture method does not provide an opportunity for students to interact with the teacher during

an instructional session, thereby making the process passive rather than active, it enables me to determine whether to increase or decrease my pace of delivery". Interviewee T1 February 11, 2022

It was also revealed that students dislike note-taking (49%) as in Table 2 and that they want their voices to be heard in the classroom so that they can express themselves and be corrected if they do not understand the concepts well, as one student stated:

"When I contribute in class and I am corrected in the event of getting some concepts wrong, it enables me to remember what I learned forever". ST3, February 21, 2022.

These results support the findings of Molenje et al. (2017), who claim that passive learning strategies are disliked by students. This implies that if students are having difficulty learning, it is because their preferred teaching methodologies are not being used in the teaching and learning processes, affecting their inner capacities to learn (Huck, 2019). As a result, Social Studies teaching and learning strategies should be tailored to the student's needs and preferences. This is in line with Namamba and Rao (2017), who are of the view that the interests of students should be prioritized, and that objectives should be logically and psychologically sound, with appropriate attention to instructional design principles and human development in accordance with their preferences. As a result, rather than pushing things on students, they should be taught what they want.

4.3 Research question 3: What possible factors affect students' preferred methods for Social Studies instruction?

The objective of this research question was to unravel factors that possibly affect students' preferred methods for Social Studies instruction. The teachers admitted that they are sometimes unable to meet the preferences of their students because they are unable to adopt a learner-centred strategy or a range of methods. They reasoned that like many other schools across the country, the indigenous classrooms lack the necessary teaching and learning materials. As a result, no arrangements are made for the availability of instructional aids such as a Social Studies laboratory or studio, or electronic devices such as projectors and televisions to assist in the projection of videos and other key contents that merit the use of visual evidence rather than theory. There is a reflection of students' responses on the reasons why teachers do not mostly use technology (1%) and graphics (1%) as indicated in Table 3. However, according to the teachers:

"There is one fortunate thing so far, and that is the teacher's laptop, popularly called "Teacher Mate One" (TMI). It helps me in doing further research... I download certain videos and pictures when I am preparing my lesson plan... However, given the number of students, I am not often able to show them to students... Neither is there a projector to project them to the benefit of the students... I am sometimes worried, but there is little I can do..." Interviewee T3 February 18, 2022.

Also, the field trip is not seen to be a part of the most used teaching methods by teachers as represented by (1%) in Table 3. Hence, concerns were also raised with respect to field trips because they have limited time with other responsibilities as follows:

"Considering the congested timetable, it becomes extremely difficult to embark on field trips since that would also mean that you would have to use other teachers' periods in addition to yours in order to embark on some trips, which, of course, is not feasible. Besides, you have to apply to your district director of education for approval of your field trip. Sometimes, applications are turned down". Interviewee T3, February 18, 2022.

"...Even after approval of the application, it is based on the condition that you write down the names of all students' parents and their contact information. The time of departure and the time of return must all be clearly spelt out before a particular trip is embarked on... It is sometimes frustrating". T2, February 15, 2022.

Given the constraints in the delivery of Social Studies, responses from the questionnaire reveal that the lecture method (81%), whole class discussion (51%), and question and answer method (57%) are the most commonly used methods in teaching Social Studies subjects as indicated in Table 3. However, they do a little bit of note taking (9%) and technology (1%), as represented in Table 3. The data also shows that, despite their desire to use televisions, laptops, projectors, and other technology devices (1%), as in Table 3, they are not utilized in the delivery of instructions due to unavailability. The school setting and climate make it difficult for them to do so. This is supported by students' responses from interviews and classroom observation, which confirmed the teachers' assertions that, while every teacher has been given a laptop to enable its use during instruction in showing videos on current issues, there are no projectors to project proper views given the number of students, posing a barrier to effectively use the technology method. According to some students:

"Of late, all the teachers have been given laptops but when our teachers intend to teach us using their laptops, it becomes difficult because we do not have projectors to project" ST2 February 15, 2022.

"We are many in the class so when our teachers are showing us some videos or pictures on their laptops, not all of us have the opportunity to view them properly, though we like it when they are using their laptops" ST3 February 21, 2022.

This inclines with Bittman et al. (2017) who discovered that most (64%) Social Studies teachers had trouble teaching while using relevant teaching Social Studies aids; instead, they used textbooks that they were interested in teaching. These findings raise questions about how teachers employ teaching materials to encourage cooperation, contemplation, building on prior knowledge, and the encouragement of behaviours that help students understand Social Studies concepts.

Moreover, with respect to students' responses to the open-ended questions, students were of the view that a lack of variety in teaching methods makes the classroom boring and, as a result, they are relegated to the background because they are not actively involved, especially when only a teacher is teaching. This does not help to address the needs, interests, and aspirations of students, and it has an impact on their performance in Social Studies teaching and learning. Because of the lack of a proper school environment and atmosphere to use other teaching and learning methods and materials, students indicated that they are sometimes forced to memorize Social Studies concepts rather than use their own imagination and intuition, experience and knowledge gained from field trips, dramatization, and other methods.

These were evident in the analysis of teachers' lesson plans, schemes of work, and classroom observations, which allowed the researchers to learn about the methods used by teachers in previous and upcoming lessons. Infrastructure and classroom situations, as well as social, physical, and educational conditions, were discovered to be unsatisfactory in meeting students' preferences and needs. As a result, students have developed a negative attitude toward Social Studies. However, no teacher used a single methodology in the delivery of lessons, according to the analysis of lesson plans, schemes of work, and classroom observations. The most common teaching and learning methods used in the delivery of Social Studies content were question and answer, whole-class discussion, and lecture.

These reiterate the fact that, despite several research findings, the only instructional strategies used in Social Studies teaching and learning were lecture-based (Meziobi & Meziobi, 2016). Teachers' replies to the interview questions matched observations in the classroom. The Social Studies teachers were found to do the most talking by asking questions, explaining concepts, and using the whiteboard and marker. Most of the questions presented in the classroom require a chorus of answers, making it difficult for teachers to determine who was correct or incorrect. Aside from that, the majority of the students were uninterested because certain students never contributed throughout the instructional hours. This was due to the fact that the methods of incorporating all students were not used.

Furthermore, certain questions were designed in such a way that students were unable to engage because they were prohibited from disputing or questioning them. Some students raised their hands for questions and answers, but due to time constraints, they were not given the chance. Teachers began their lessons by asking students questions about past themes, which they answered with a chorus. Students in some classes raised their hands when they were asked to answer the questions. Not everyone who raised their hands was given the opportunity to speak. Also, not all students asked or responded to questions. The majority of the questions did not foster exploration learning, and students were

also denied the option to develop their own interpretations of some ideas. It was also noted that the questions asked did not allow students to communicate and share ideas prior to replying to them.

As a result, teachers became the directors of everything in the classroom, and students were required to follow the teachers' orders. There were differences in the number of students in each group during group discussions, and there were no group leaders to govern the groups by guiding discussions and follow-ups. This reveals that either teacher does not apply holistic approaches in the teaching and learning process as needed by the Social Studies curriculum, or they are unaware of the relevant strategies.

Teachers believe that teaching and learning resources make it easier to teach and learn. Such materials, however, are unavailable, and those that are meant to be prepared by the teacher are also difficult to prepare. Textbooks, a whiteboard, and a pen were the only teaching and learning resources used in the classes. Due to a lack of resources, teachers were unable to employ appropriate teaching and learning tools to actively engage students in the lessons.

Traditional evaluation procedures were discovered to be used in evaluating students. According to classroom observation and interview's responses to the questions, teachers used only oral question and answer methods as well as paper and pen methods of evaluation. Oftentimes, students were not permitted to make comments, criticize, or express issues about the lessons' topics. This prevented the teacher from assessing the lesson to determine whether the topic was clear to the students. The assessment was sometimes done by assigning students' homework at home. When the homework assignments were examined more closely, it was discovered that students merely copied answers from the textbook without developing their own understanding. Furthermore, the majority of the questions were not thought-provoking enough to encourage students to think critically. The majority of the time, students were expected to list or say certain concepts without ever elaborating on them. Except for written assignments, there were no practical activities. Only oral responses to questions were used in the assessment methods. This prevented a thorough evaluation of the technique for improving learning (Kitta & Tilya, 2010), and consequently, affected students' preferences of methods of instruction. These consequently have effects on students' attitudes towards Social Studies. This is because other findings show that some students regard Social Studies as uninteresting, while others consider it a simple topic, and that the majority of students do not take Social Studies seriously. Some students are uninterested in the subject, according to teachers, and not all students participate in class discussions, ask questions, or take group work and presentations seriously. Their responses to the interview questions revealed the following:

"Others do not also take note-taking seriously, even though they do not have their own personal textbooks... Students are also less committed to studying the Social Studies subject because they consider it very easy and a reading subject with most of the topics being familiar and easily related... Complacency is another issue that students face when learning Social Studies, as they do not pay attention during the teaching and learning process". Interviewee T2, February 15, 2022.

"Students perceive Social Studies to be familiar and relatable to other topics, easy to pass, and therefore need less attention to Social Studies". Interviewee T1, February 11, 2022.

These correspond to student replies from the interview, which suggested that Social Studies is relatively simple compared to other disciplines. Some of their responses were as follows:

"Sometimes, when I pick a Social Studies textbook or pamphlet to read or learn, it looks so easy and I feel that I understand, so I leave it to study other subjects, but when I go to write exams, I do not perform" ST3, February 21, 2022.

"As for me, I have lost interest in Social Studies, so I do not normally learn it. It looks boring to me sometimes". ST6, February 21, 2022.

"Sometimes, some teachers tell us to focus on English, Mathematics, and Science because even if we learn Social Studies and score an "A" in West Africa Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE), it will not be used to grade us. Since then, learning Social Studies appears to be a waste of time, so I hardly ever learn

These findings are consistent with Lawson (2003), who reported that Social Studies obtained the lowest score in the survey when compared to English and Mathematics. Students' lackadaisical attitudes regarding Social Studies were also shown by Mensah (2020), with the notion that it is a simple subject to passing and hence requires less attention than English and Mathematics. As a result, students are less motivated to pursue Social Studies since they believe it is irrelevant to their lives. However, these students' replies appear to be quite concerning, as they appear to represent a roadblock to achieving the Social Studies objectives. This is a wake-up call to the Ghana Education Service and other stakeholders to take Social Studies seriously and use it as a grading tool, which will encourage students to learn the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes to be well-suited to their respective societies in order to eliminate societal ills.

5. Conclusion

A concurrent triangulation mixed-method strategy was adopted in investigating students' preferred methods of instruction for teaching Social Studies. It also investigated possible factors that affect students' preferred instructional methods. A convergent parallel mixed method was employed in the data collection. According to the findings of the study, students prefer the use of numerous approaches in the teaching and learning of Social Studies. It also shows that students prefer learner-centred approaches to teacher-centred approaches. As a result, in order to have vibrant Social Studies instruction and learning with students actively interested in achieving Social Studies objectives, teachers must switch up their teaching methods and evaluation methodologies. It was once again discovered that while certain instructional approaches can only be used to achieve a few specific goals, others can achieve numerous goals at once. The use of questions in the presentation aroused the interest of students and motivated them to study more. It was also discovered that instructional materials play a critical role in ensuring teacher's efficiency and students' active participation in class.

The chalk-and-talk method is not necessarily the most effective method for teaching Social Studies. It was also discovered that the school environment and atmosphere act as barriers to the adoption of appropriate and diversified teaching and learning approaches in order to meet the preferences of students in Social Studies instructional methods. It was also shown that students' opinions regarding Social Studies extend beyond Social Studies class to include negative indoctrination by some subject teachers who regard Social Studies as a non-gradable topic and thus discourage students from studying it. This is a significant setback in terms of achieving the goals of Social Studies and generating competent, concerned, critical-thinking, and problem-solving citizens who can help eradicate societal problems. On the basis of the foregoing, it can be concluded that students will be able to learn best by actively involved in the teaching and learning process, making it student-centered to enable the realization of the objectives of Social Studies, which will help instill in them, citizenship education to become competent and concerned citizens, and critical thinkers geared towards problem solving and consequently, development through the adoption of students' preferred methods of teaching.

6. Recommendations

This study recommends the followings based on the preceding findings:

Teachers should be given in-service training on how to use different teaching methods to fit the needs of their students. Teachers should also choose appropriate and varied teaching and learning strategies so that students will be actively involved in the teaching and learning process. The Ghana Education Service, non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, and other charitable institutions and individuals should provide schools with the necessary teaching and learning materials for effective Social Studies teaching and learning as soon as possible.

Teachers of other subject who indulge in negative indoctrination that Social Studies subject is not gradable in WASSCE should desist from such. This is because the teaching of Social Studies goes beyond passing examinations to impart to students, citizenship education and values to be critical thinkers and problem solvers geared towards development. Therefore, the National Commission for Civic Education, the Ghana Education Service, non-governmental organizations, and civil society organizations should educate and sensitize students, teachers, and the general public

about the importance of Social Studies in developing concerned, competent and responsible citizens to help eradicate social ills on the planet.

7. Limitations and suggestions for further studies

The study was conducted in only Afadzato South District of Ghana. This study, therefore, suggests that further studies be conducted on all the schools in the district as well as some selected schools across the country to be able to unravel all the students' preferred methods of instruction in Social Studies so as to make teaching and learning more engaging and to realize the objectives of Social Studies in promoting citizenship education. Besides, studies should also be done on teachers' preferred methods of instruction in Social Studies.

Conflict of interest

No conflict of interest was declared by the authors.

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