

Research Article

Teachers Perspective on Redesigning Social Studies Curriculum for Student-Centered and Constructivist Learning: Empirical Study of Secondary Schools, Northern Region

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Abstract: Effective, equitable, and student-centered Social Studies instruction occurs in an environment that is prepared and well designed for that purpose. The 21st Century Social Studies curriculum should be planned to allow teachers to adopt constructivist, student-centered pedagogies to improve students' learning outcomes. However, it appears that most teachers in Ghana still apply traditional rote methods of instruction, which deprive students of the ability to acquire 21st-century learning due to weaknesses in the existing curriculum. This study was, therefore, conducted to explore from teachers how the Social Studies curriculum can be reformed to create room for active and student-centered learning. A cross-sectional research design was adopted for this study. Senior High School (SHS) Social Studies teachers in the Northern Region were the target population for the study ($N = 175$ teachers). Using Yamane's (1967) formula for sample size determination, 151 teachers were randomly sampled for the study with a confidence level of 97% and a margin of error of $\pm 3\%$. Closed-ended item questionnaires were used to collect data from the respondents. The reliability of the items in the questionnaires was tested using the Cronbach alpha formula, which yielded $\alpha = 0.78$, acceptable for the study. Using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), data were analyzed employing descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, and the results were presented in tables. The study discovered strong endorsement by teachers of the need for a new Social Studies curriculum that provides opportunities for meaningful learning; a call for Social Studies curriculum reform to create room for student-centered learning to improve students' learning outcomes in line with SDG 4. The study recommends curriculum reforms, capacity-building programmes for teachers based on training needs, supply of relevant instructional resources, expansion of SHSs infrastructure, and rethinking the ban on SHS students' use of phones and personal laptops on campuses.

Keywords: curriculum, constructivist approach, learning, social studies, student-centered learning

1. Introduction

Ghana's Education Strategic Plan (2018-2030) outlined the goal and objectives aimed at realizing the ambition of propelling Ghana into a 'learning nation'. It aims to sustain the gains of the current educational system and prescribes strategies to address the obstacles in order to provide every Ghanaian child the opportunity to succeed and contribute

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to the national development. The goal is to improve the quality of education for all and provide lifelong learning opportunities in line with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) Each sub-sector within the education system has a strategic goal which is based on three policy objectives, namely: (1) improved equitable access to and participation in inclusive and equitable education at all levels; (2) improved quality of teaching and learning and STEM at all levels; and (3) sustainable and efficient management, financing and accountability of education service delivery (Ministry of Education, 2019). This will put the country on the right footing toward the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. In secondary education, several subjects are studied, including Social Studies, to prepare the students for the future.

In Ghana, the goal of Social Studies is Citizenship Education. Citizenship Education, according to Aggarwal (2002), is the acquisition of relevant ideas, beliefs, habits, behaviour and attitudes of the individual to enable him to become a useful member of the society and contribute meaningfully to the upliftment of society. In agreement with Aggarwal, Quartey (1984) cited in Opare (2019), observes that Social Studies is a study that equips learners with instruments needed to solve personal and community-related issues. The main goal of Social Studies for citizenship education in support of Quartey and Aggarwal is to inculcate into learners the relevant knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will enable them to think critically and creatively and make reflective decisions and act on them to resolve personal and societal challenges. Ayaaba and Odumah (2013) summed up the general objectives of teaching Social Studies to include learner adaptation to the changing environment; development of nationalism, identity and unity; acquisition of desirable attitudes, positive values and relevant skills; development of good citizens who are competent, capable with leadership qualities, and willing to contribute towards local and national development; and training the learner to develop the ability to make critical decisions in solving personal and societal challenges. Owing to the above-mentioned crucial role of Social Studies, the subject is a core subject in the curriculum of Senior High Schools (SHSs) in Ghana.

In her qualitative study on causes of poor performance of students in Social Studies among basic school learners in Namibia, Negumbo (2016) cited the absence of trained teachers, congested and unconducive learning environments, inadequate instructional resources, insufficient teaching pedagogies that places the child at the center of instruction, limited time, and low parental involvement in the education of their wards as factors responsible for low performance of students in Social Studies among basic school pupils. Walberg's perception model (1976) assumes that the learning environment is prone to not only teachers impacting on learners, but also students having an influence on the teacher and that of their peers. Similarly, Winne and Marx (1982) in their cognitive mediation model argue that instructors have direct control over how learners think and behave during teaching and that it is the student's thinking process that yields learning. Rohrkemper (1984) hypothesized that in a typical classroom, "all is not as it appears". This calls for teachers to be armed with information and skills on how students actively process, interpret, and share their experiences in classrooms. An innovative curriculum is also important if students are to be trained holistically to enable them to become competent, productive, and willing to contribute to the national development.

However, stakeholders in the education sector in Ghana have agreed that the current Senior High School curriculum including Social Studies does not churn out students who are well equipped with technical and career skills to make them employable after school. It does not produce students who are equipped with the 21st Century skills of critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, entrepreneurship, global citizenship and leadership enable them to effectively contribute to national development. As a result, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA) and T-Tel Ghana in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and others have started the process of reviewing the SHS curriculum. However, as usual, the approach has been the top-down one. This study was, therefore, conducted to solicit teachers' views on the type and shape of the new Social Studies curriculum to make it more relevant and create a room for active, inclusive, equitable, and student-centered 21st century learning; and to inform policies and best practices.

1.1 Research questions

The research was guided by the following questions:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of meaningful Social Studies instruction?
2. What strategies can be employed in the new curriculum to make Social Studies instruction equitable and challenging to stimulate critical thinking, creativity, communication, leadership, and collaboration in students?
3. How can the Social Studies curriculum be redesigned to make it student-centered to allow for the adoption of problem-based and constructivist approaches in its implementation?

2. Theoretical and empirical overview

2.1 An overview of the concept curriculum

The curriculum is a broad concept defined variously by different scholars. As a result of this, the concept curriculum is most often characterized as elusive, fragmentary and confusing. The existing definitions are informed by pedagogy, teaching philosophies, political ideology, modes of thought as well as environmental and cultural experiences. Stotsky (2012) opines that a curriculum is a plan of action geared towards accomplishing the desired goals and objectives. In other words, a curriculum is a set of learning activities designed to equip the learner with relevant knowledge, skills, and competencies as stipulated by the educational system. It includes the school subjects and activities that a given school system is responsible for. Additionally, it defines the environment where certain learning activities ought to take place. Similarly, Adentwi (2005) defines curriculum as the total of all educationally valuable experiences that students undergo under the direction and guidance of a school. It includes hidden curriculum and co-curricular activities. In agreement with Adentwi's assertion, Tamakloe (2008) opines that a curriculum is made up of a selection of socially valued knowledge, attitudes, skills and values that a learner is made to acquire through the various forms of planning. The scope of the above definition has been broadened to include experiences from both hidden and co-curriculum. Factors that influence curriculum implementation include: (1) the learners; (2) the teacher; (3) instructional resources and facilities; (4) interest groups; (5) the school environment/climate; (6) culture and ideology; and (7) instructional supervision (Whitaker, 1993).

Presently, the curriculum has been conceived differently. For instance, the humanistic, social reconstructionist, systemic, and academic curricula have their own way of affecting the curriculum (Young, 2011). The humanistic curriculum focuses on individualism. This curriculum is focused on helping learners discover themselves as they climb the educational ladder. Humanists conceptualize a curriculum as a spontaneous and exploratory instrument. The function of a curriculum is to foster intrinsic rewards for learning. In the end, self-actualization is the goal (McNeil, 2009) cited in Eshun (2015). In this study, the concept of Social Studies curriculum is used to refer to all that a teacher thinks, perceives, and prefers about the goal, rationale, nature and purpose of the subject in teaching, learning and assessment. Five main conceptions of a curriculum have been identified: (1) curriculum has to do with the development of processes or skills, especially in the cognitive domain rather than social domains; (2) curriculum focuses on exploiting approaches to maximize outputs; (3) curriculum is about reforming society in order to bring about greater justice and benefits for all, (4) curriculum is about maximizing the humanity of individuals by supporting them grow to their full potential; and (5) curriculum was geared towards identifying and passing on valued academic knowledge and intellectual skills (Eisner & Vallance, 1974; Cheung, 2000) cited in Eshun (2015).

Glatthorn (2000) identified seven typologies of curriculum, namely: hidden curriculum, learned curriculum, assessed curriculum, recommended curriculum, written curriculum, taught curriculum and supported curriculum. Other categorization of curriculum includes official curriculum, core curriculum, co-curriculum, hidden curriculum, overt/written curriculum, subject or discipline-centered curriculum, activity/experience curriculum and integrated curriculum among others. Change is a constant law of nature. It stimulates improvement and often occurs continuously. Change is an ongoing, almost unconscious process that involves networking familiar elements into new relationships. While all changes do not lead to progress, all improvement requires change. School curricula must meet the needs of the people at any point in time.

2.2 Empirical and theoretical overview

This paper is grounded on the Constructivist theory of learning (Bartlett, 1932; Bruner, 1993), which is rooted in the Progressive Education theory by Dewey (1929). The Constructivist perspective of learning is grounded in the works of Dewey (1929); Bruner (1961); Vygotsky (1962); and Piaget (1980). Educational planners often compare constructivism to objectivism which is perceived and directly departs from constructivism. The objectivist theory is rooted in the work of behaviorists, such as Skinner (1953). Proponents of objectivism assume that information itself is knowable outside the bounds of any human mind, and that individual interpretation of knowledge can be said to be either appropriate or wrong. Objectivists view individual pieces of information as symbols or currency that can be acquired by humans and transferred from human to human-provided the appropriate learning environments existed

(Jonassen, 1991).

2.3 An overview of constructivist theory of learning

Proponents of constructivism argue that it is what the learner does that he/she learns, and not what the teacher does and that knowledge and reality are determined by learners' experiences. The implication is that students learn from their previous experiences; hence, Social Studies teaching and learning should be planned such that learners can interact with the teacher, with peers and with instructional resources including technology to construct a knowledge base on their own experiences. This perspective diverges from the objectivist view about learning, which presumes that knowledge exists independently of the knower, and that understanding is coming to know what already exists. In contrast, constructivists argue that deep learning will occur only when the learner is actively engaged in, operating upon, or mentally processing and practicing, incoming stimuli (Chin & Williams, 2018). In Ghana, the current Common Core Social Studies curriculum implemented in junior high schools is grounded on the constructivist perspective of learning, where students are expected to think, interact with and discover knowledge base on their experiences rather than memorization of concepts, facts and generalizations from teachers. That explains why in Social Studies classrooms, teachers are required to put learners in groups for cooperative learning and peer tutoring (Ayaaba & Odumah, 2013). In their research article on Applying Technology to Restructuring and Learning, Burns et al. (2002) outlined six principles as important to constructivist learning theory. They are: learners bring unique prior knowledge, experience, and beliefs to a learning situation; knowledge is constructed uniquely and individually, in multiple ways, through a variety of authentic tools, resources, experiences, and contexts; learning is both an active and reflective process; learning is a developmental process of accommodation, assimilation, or rejection to construct new conceptual structures, meaningful representations, or new mental models; social interaction introduces multiple perspectives through reflection, collaboration, negotiation, and shared meaning; and finally, learning is internally controlled and mediated by the learner.

Consequently, the three types of constructivism that teachers can apply in their teaching are: social constructivism (which emphasized that learning from others helps students to construct their own knowledge and reality); cognitive constructivism pioneered by Jean Piaget (which advocates that learning should be connected to students' level of cognitive development); and radical constructivism pioneered by Glaserfeld (2014) (which emphasized knowledge is invented, not discovered). In a constructivist learning environment, knowledge is constructed, not received, and students learn to learn, as they learn; learning is seen as an active process; learning is perceived as a social activity; learning is contextual; knowledge is personal; learning exists in the mind; and motivation is key to successful learning. According to Olusegun (2015), constructivist learning environments depend on four critical factors, namely: Knowledge is shared between teachers and learners; authority is shared between teachers and students; teachers act as facilitators of the process, not lecturers, and learning is conducted in small groups normally consisting of heterogeneous students. Therefore, constructivism promotes active, inclusive and student-centered 21st century learning instructional strategies, such as experiential learning, problem-based learning, cooperative learning, project works, activity-based learning, and independent learning, among others.

2.4 Principles of constructivist theory of learning

The Constructivist approach to Social Studies teaching and learning is grounded on research on the human brain and how learning occurs in humans, which Caine and Caine (1991) cited in Olusegun (2015) summarized into 12 principles as follows:

1. Learning involves the entire physiology; instructors should not focus on the intellect alone.
2. The Human brain is a parallel processor, and can concurrently process varied kinds of information such as reflections, cultural knowledge and emotions. Meaningful instruction, therefore, adopts a variety of learning strategies. This implies that Social Studies should employ different student-centered, equitable and inclusive instructional approaches during teaching and learning to meet the needs of all learners.
3. Investigations for accurate interpretation of concepts happen by means of patterning. Therefore, meaningful teaching and learning must link isolated ideas and information from local, regional, national, and global themes. Social Studies teachers can achieve this by designing their instruction using the spiral approach.
4. Emotions are critical to patterning. Meaningful learning is greatly informed by feelings, attitudes, and emotions.

Therefore, a positive motivating learning environment should be created for effective teaching and learning to occur.

5. The search for meaning is innate. Effective instruction recognizes that meaning is unique and personal and that learners construct meaning based on their own experiences. This implies that teachers should cater to individual differences during instruction including the adoption of a differentiated approach to meet the peculiar needs of all students.

6. Effective learning involves both peripheral perceptions and focused attention. Culture significantly influenced learning, climate, and the learning environment. This implies the need for Social Studies teachers to create a tension-free and democratic learning environment during the teaching and learning process to stimulate the participation of all learners.

7. The human brain processes parts and whole concurrently. Children find it cumbersome learning when wholes or either part are ignored.

8. Effective learning often involves conscious and unconscious processes. Students, therefore, require adequate time to process "how" as well as "what" they have learned and how to apply it in a real-life situation to solve problems.

9. There are two types of memory, namely: a spatial memory system, and a set of systems for rote learning. Teaching and learning that heavily rely on rote learning does not facilitate spatial, and experiential learning and can inhibit understanding of concepts, critical thinking and creativity, and the application of knowledge gained. The reverse is also true.

10. Learning is stimulated by challenges and constrained by threats; hence, Social Studies teachers should always ensure that the classroom environment presents challenges for students to resolve and is not threatening to students. All forms of corporal punishment must cease in schools to make them safe spaces for effective teaching and learning.

11. Children learn concepts better when principles, concepts, theories and generalizations are incorporated into natural, and real-life situations. Experiential learning is, therefore, required during the teaching and learning process to stimulate authentic learning.

12. Each brain is unique. This implies that teaching and learning should be multifaceted to provide students the opportunity to express their preferences. Differentiated instruction is relevant in this regard.

2.5 Differences between traditional and constructivist learning environments

Table 1 below illustrates the differences between a traditional learning environment and that of a Constructivist one. Significant differences exist concerning children and how they learn, knowledge construction, and learning.

Table 1. Distinction between traditional and constructive learning environments

Traditional learning environment	Constructivist learning environment
Teaching according to curriculum prescription and fixed curriculum is highly recognized.	Seeking learners' needs, interest and questions is highly valued.
Instructional materials are usually workbooks and textbooks.	Instructional resources normally consist of primary sources of resources, community resources and interactive resources.
The curriculum places emphasis on basic skills of learners and starts in parts of the whole.	The curriculum begins with the whole and gradually expands to include parts and emphasizes big concepts.
Repetition forms the basis for learning which promotes rote learning.	Learning is active and interactive, building on previous knowledge of students, which promotes critical thinking, creativity, and innovation.
Teachers' role is by commands, grounded in authority.	Teachers' duty is facilitator, underpinned in negotiation.
Evaluating learning is mainly assessing, correct answers. End justify the means.	Assessment is mainly competence base comprising students' work, interviews, observations, portfolios, tests, and exhibitions. Process is as important as product.
Knowledge is seen as inert.	Knowledge is perceived as dynamic, ever changing with learners' experiences.
Students mainly work alone.	Learners normally study in groups to stimulate cooperative learning, team work, peer teaching, collaboration and creativity.
Instructors share information with learners; learners are passive recipient of concepts and skills from the teacher.	Students work collaboratively to construct knowledge based on their own experiences.

Source: Adapted from Olusegun (2015)

The differences between the traditional classroom and that of the constructivist as captured in Table 1 are clear. Tam (2000) reminded us that while much of the early work in traditional instructional settings is derived from objectivist theory, modern academic minds have come to accept that learning environments, which more closely match the needs of constructivist learning, will foster effective delivery of quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. The actual usefulness of constructivist learning in Social Studies are emphasized, which include the teaching of core competencies, such as problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, digital literacy, national identity, and global citizenship skills.

3. Materials and methods

3.1 Study area

Northern Region, located in the northern part of Ghana, was the largest of the ten regions in Ghana until 2018 when North East and Savana Regions were created from it. From 2010-2021, this region documented the highest population growth rate in Ghana (3.7%) above the national average of (2.1%). In terms of population, Northern Region recorded a population of 2,310,939 persons comprising 1,141,705 females and 1,169,234 females. Politically, the region is divided into 16 administrative districts (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021), while Tamale is the capital town. Over 75% of the economically active population in the region is into agriculture. Educationally, the Northern region is presently blessed with 47 SHSs with several primary and junior high schools. The region also housed University for Development Studies, Tamale Technical University as well as a few Teachers and Nurses training colleges. In connection with learning outcomes, results from the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Exam (WASSCE) have been poor for both core and elective science and mathematics subjects, particularly in 2015. These results diverge substantially across regions, with the five northern regions performing most poorly. Gender disparities in performance, to the detriment of girls, exist across all regions for Mathematics, Integrated Science, and Social Studies; and, in the five northern regions, for English as well (Ministry of Education, 2019). Anthropologically, the Northern Region is a heterogeneous one with many ethnic groups such as Dagombas, Mamprusis, Gonjas, Nanumbas and Knkombas among others. Dagombas is the main ethnic group in the region with Dagbani as the local language. Traditionally, a significant portion of the region is ruled by Yaa Naa (King of Dagbon) supported by paramount, divisional and local chiefs.

3.2 Research design and data collection

A cross-sectional research design was adopted by this study to probe ways the Social Studies curriculum can be redesigned to facilitate active and student-centered 21st century learning. According to Kumar (1996), cross-sectional is best suited in studies aimed at finding out the prevalence of a situation, phenomenon, attitude, or issue by taking a cross-section of the population. SHSs Social Studies teachers in Northern Region were the target population for the study (N = 175 teachers). In cross-sectional studies, several criteria need to be considered to determine appropriate sample size, namely; level of confidence or error, level of precision, external validity, and the degree of variability in the features being measured. In this study, out of 47 senior high schools in Northern Region, 16 schools representing 34.04% were sampled for the study using the Simple Random Sampling (SRS) strategy. Simple Random Sampling (SRS) is generally understood to be free from sample bias (Al-hassan, 2015). In each sampled school visited, Social Studies teachers were selected using the judgmental or purposive sampling methods. The rationale for the choice of this sampling strategy was to enable the researchers to accomplish the goal of this study. According to Kumar (1996), the primary consideration in purposive sampling is the judgement of the researcher as to who can provide the best information to achieve the objectives of the study. Sample size affects the accuracy of representation, and a large sample means less chance of error. From 175 Social Studies teachers, the researchers follow Yamane's (1967) formula for sample size calculations to compute the sample size, from which 151 teachers were sampled with a confidence level of 97% and a margin error of ±3. The formula is stated as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

Where:

n = Sample size;

N = Sample frame;

1 = Constant;

e = margin of error (considered at 3%).

Structured questionnaires with closed-ended items were used to mine data from the respondents. The questionnaires were designed with the summated rating or the Likert scale. The Likert scale is based on the assumption that each item on the scale has equal attitudinal value or weight in terms of reflecting an attitude towards the issue in question (Kumar, 1996). The questionnaires were administered by the researchers. In all, 160 questionnaires were given out to the teachers to complete. A week later, the team went back to the schools to collect the data. In all, 153 questionnaires (representing 95.625%) were collected, of which 2 were incomplete. The remaining 151 which resent the sample size were entered Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 for analysis. The questionnaire's return rate was, therefore, 95.625%.

3.3 Data analysis

The data collected were coded and entered SPSS version 20. Excellent enhancement and data cleaning were done before quantitative instruments involving percentages, frequencies, means and standard deviations were employed in analyzing the data. To obtain orderly and sequential discourse, the analysis began with the demographic biodata of the respondents. Socially Acceptable Response Syndrome (SARS), also called social desirability bias, was curtailed using strategies such as clearly defining the role of study participants, educating participants on the purpose of the survey, probing about debatable issues subtly, and framing all responses as normal behaviour. Employing Cronbach Alpha which yielded $\alpha = 0.78$, internal consistencies of the items on the questionnaires (reliability) were validated. With the support of SPSS version 20, data were analyzed using descriptive statistics involving frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviations and the results of which were presented in tables.

3.4 Demographic variables of respondents

The general demographic data of respondents such as age, gender, and qualification are illustrated in this section

3.4.1 Teachers' age

The ages of teachers who took part in the research were documented and clustered into cohorts comprising those within 20-30 years, 31-40 years, 41-50 years, and 51 years and above. The age distribution of respondents is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Teachers' age

Teachers' age (in years)	Frequency	Percent (%)
20-30 years	27	17.9
31-40 years	57	37.7
41-50 years	61	40.4
51 years and above	6	4.0
Total	151	100

Field survey (2022)

Table 2 results show that 27 respondents representing (17.9%) were within the age category of 20-30 years, 57 participants (37.7%) fell within 31-40 years, and 61 respondents (40.4%) were within the ages of 41-50 years. Only six teachers (4.0%) were 51 years and above. This indicates that the majority of the teachers were within the age bracket of 41-50 years which was appropriate since they are likely to have rich experience in teaching the subject. However, experience is not the only variable that influences teachers' performance in classrooms. Other variables like sex, professional and academic qualification, location of the school, health status, and teachers' motivation, among others, also influence teachers' propensity to perform in Social Studies class.

3.4.2 Teachers' gender

Gender, as constructed in the study, yielded data on the total number of teachers who were males and those who were females. Table 3 presents the gender distribution of participants.

Table 3. Gender distribution of respondents

Teachers' gender	Frequency	Percent (%)
Male	119	78.8
Female	32	21.2
Total	151	100.0

Field survey (2022)

Results from Table 3 indicate that 119 respondents (representing 78.8%) were males, while the remaining 32 teachers (21.2%) were females. This implies that there were more male Social Studies teachers in SHSs in Northern Region of Ghana than females. This implies that education policymakers should design interventions to address this gender gap between male and female Social Studies teachers in the study area. Teachers' gender seems to play a role in the performance of students in schools. Fitchett (2010) cited in Angbing (2014) discovered that, demographically, teachers of Social Studies are disproportionately male compared to other subject teachers. He added that similar research on gender within the context of Social Studies education has concluded that the male orientation of the social sciences discourages most females from entering the field, but this could be contested depending on the context.

3.5 Results and discussion

The results from the study are presented in tables for discussion. Tables are the most popular method of presenting analyzed data. Tables provide a useful means of presenting large amounts of detailed information in a small space (The Chicago Manual of Style 1992: 321) cited in Kumar (1996). The discussions are carried out based on the research questions stated earlier to direct the study.

Research Question 1: What are teachers' perceptions of meaningful Social Studies instruction?

This question sought to find out from the teachers' perception of meaningful Social Studies teaching and learning which was measured by categorizing and calculating the mean score of each item's results as shown in Table 4.

The data in Table 4 on general average perceptions of teachers towards meaningful social studies instruction stood at (Mean = 4.37497, SD = 0.765909). The above data implies that teachers have a high perception of how the new Social Studies curriculum can be designed to provide opportunities for meaningful learning. Specifically, the Social Studies curriculum should engage students in the formulation of educational goals, selection of instructional strategies and assessment of learning outcomes (Mean = 3.729, SD = 1.32745); focus on the psychological and developmental needs of students (Mean = 4.3113, SD = 0.88080); emphasize on the social world, its challenges, strengths, and its

prospects (Mean = 4.4909, SD = 0.76479); include the study of not only man's accomplishments but also challenges encountered (Mean = 4.4702, SD = 0.79000); and emphasize on contemporary, enduring and pervasive social problems and link them to the real life of students (Mean = 4.5762, SD = 0.59371). Constructivism does not mean receiving and memorizing theories, knowledge, skills and facts, but rather reflective analysis and thinking to the knowledge is subjected. This type of teaching and learning can guide learners towards frequent thinking, questioning, and critiquing, which are the essential attributes of critical thinkers (Kuş, 2014). The goal of critical thinking in Social Studies is to prepare pupils to take responsibility for their learning, self-assessment, question, think creatively and reflectively, make appropriate judgements, test hypotheses and find solutions to problems.

Table 4. Teachers' perceptions of meaningful social studies instruction

Making Social Studies teaching and learning meaningful	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Social Studies curriculum should engage students in formulation educational goals, selection of instructional strategies and assessment of learning outcomes	151	3.729	1.32745
Should be focused on the psychological and developmental needs of students	151	4.3113	0.88080
Social Studies curriculum should put emphasis on the social world, its challenges, strengths, and its prospects	151	4.4909	0.76479
Social Studies programmes should include the study of man's accomplishments as well as challenges encountered	151	4.4702	0.79000
Social Studies courses must put emphasis on contemporary, enduring and pervasive social problems and link them to the real life of students	151	4.5762	0.59371
Social Studies programmes should illustrate the relationships among global, regional, national, and local issues	151	4.4768	0.60920
Social Studies curriculum must incorporate an analysis of and efforts to design solutions to current and controversial global challenges	151	4.4238	0.72514
Social Studies courses should offer recurring and intensive cross-cultural study of groups	151	4.3046	0.59993
It should provide safe spaces for students to positively interact with members of other ethnic, cultural, racial, religious and political groups	151	4.5364	0.70969
Social Studies courses should offer spaces for learners to examine potential future problems, conditions, and potentials	151	4.4305	0.65838

Filed survey (2022)

In addition, a Social Studies programme should illustrate the relationships among global, regional, national, and local issues (Mean = 4.4768, SD = 0.60920); incorporate an analysis of and efforts to design solutions to current and controversial local and global challenges (Mean = 4.4238, SD = 0.72514); offer a recurring and intensive cross-cultural study of groups (Mean = 4.3046, SD = 0.59993); and provide safe spaces for students to positively interact with members of other ethnic, cultural, racial, religious and political groups (Mean = 4.5364, SD = 0.70969). The above shows the general endorsement of the student-centered Social Studies curriculum. This, therefore, must be considered when preparing the new Social Studies curriculum for SHSs in Ghana for a meaningful impact.

Research Question 2: What strategies can be employed to make Social Studies instruction inclusive and challenging to stimulate critical thinking, creativity, communication and collaboration in students?

This question probed the participants on strategies to adopt to make Social Studies instruction inclusive and

challenging to enhance critical thinking, creativity, communication and collaboration among students. Data was collected using a questionnaire designed on a five points Likert scale the results of which are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Teachers' views on how to make Social Studies instruction equitable and challenging to stimulate problem-based learning, critical thinking, creativity, communication and collaboration in students

Making teaching and learning of Social Studies challenging to stimulate effective learning	SD	D	N	A	SA
The Social Studies instruction should offer learners with challenging content, instructional activities and assessment of learning outcomes	5 (3.3%)	5 (3.3%)	6 (4.0%)	89 (58.9%)	46 (30.5%)
The Social Studies programme should provide learners the opportunity to engage in reflective thinking and discussion as they listen carefully and respond to each other's views to find solutions to problems	1 (0.7%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (2.0%)	73 (48.3%)	74 (49.0%)
The Social Studies programme should expose students to various sources of information that include controversial issues with conflicting and divergent perspectives	3 (2.0%)	6 (4.0%)	10 (6.6%)	59 (39.1%)	73 (48.3%)
The Social Studies course must offer students the opportunity to formulate written and oral responses to content-based issues and questions	1 (0.7%)	3 (2.0%)	10 (6.6%)	86 (57.0%)	51 (33.8%)
The Social Studies programme should provide a connection to the world of work through investigation into various careers and the application of critical social studies skills and essential knowledge	0 (0.0%)	3 (2.0%)	9 (6.0%)	64 (42.4%)	75 (49.7%)
The Social Studies curriculum must emphasize on core competences, values, and desirable attitudes needed for national development	1 (0.7%)	2 (1.3%)	1 (0.7%)	57 (37.7%)	90 (59.6%)
The Social Studies curriculum should stimulate learners to function as a learning community in a democratic environment	1 (0.7%)	1 (0.7%)	5 (3.3%)	85 (56.3%)	59 (39.1%)
The Social Studies lessons must integrate technology into teaching and learning to equip students with digital literacy	2 (1.3%)	2 (1.3%)	6 (4.0%)	62 (41.1%)	79 (52.3%)

Key: SD-Strongly Disagree, D-Disagree, N-Neutral, A-Agree, SA-Strongly Agree
Field survey (2022)

Results in Table 5 indicated an overwhelming endorsement by the teachers on transforming the social studies curriculum into an inclusive and challenging one to facilitate Problem-Based Learning (PBL). Specifically, social studies instruction should offer learners challenging content, instructional activities and assessment of learning outcomes (Agree = 58.9%, Strongly Agree = 30.5%). The Social Studies programme should provide learners the opportunity to engage in reflective thinking and discussion as they listen carefully and respond to each other's views to find solutions to problems (Agree = 48.3%, Strongly Agree = 49.0%). Problem-Based Learning involves critical and reflective thinking. Eby and Kujawa's reflective thinking model (1994) listed seven steps which include observation, thinking, collection of data, weighing moral principles, passing a judgement, considering approaches, and action. Progressivism and Pragmatism are the philosophical basis for reflective thinking. Sivakumar (2018) discovered that problem-solving strategy enables the students to think about a problem, understand the problem and finally evaluate information in order to find a solution(s) to the problem that has been identified and focuses the learner's attention on activities that may involve arrangement, classification, sorting out and interacting with facts with the ultimate goal of finding logical answers to problems.

The Social Studies course must offer students the opportunity to formulate written and oral responses to content-based issues and questions; 57.0% Agree with the statement, while 33.8% Strongly Agree. Also, the Social Studies programmes should provide a connection to the world of work through the investigation into various careers and the application of critical social studies skills and essential knowledge (Agree = 42.4%, Strongly Agree = 49.7%); must emphasize the core competencies, values, and desirable attitudes needed for national development (Agree = 37.7%, Strongly Agree = 59.6%); should stimulate learners to function as a learning community in a democratic environment

(Agree = 56.3%, Strongly Agree = 39.1%). Kuş (2014) summed up by saying that the objective of Social Studies is training learners to become citizens who can adopt democratic ideals, arming learners with skills to adapt to the changing society, and creating avenues for students to practice their knowledge. Social Studies, as a discipline, strives to create a democratic society and enable members of such a society to gain basic knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to enable them to live and be lived with. Additionally, Social Studies lessons must integrate technology into teaching and learning to equip students with digital literacy (Agree = 41.1%, Strongly Agree = 52.3%). These findings concur with those from Bariham (2022), whose research on teachers' perception of online learning concluded that teachers had a positive perception of online learning with an average online learning perception of (Mean = 4.417, SD = 0.694). This can serve as a favorable environment for the Government of Ghana's digitization programme to be effectively implemented in schools to improve the learning outcomes of students.

Research Question 3: How can the Social Studies curriculum be made student-centered to allow for the adoption of constructivist approaches in its implementation?

This question was designed to find out from the respondents how the Social Studies curriculum could be redesigned to make it student-centered to allow for the application of constructivist approaches in its implementation. Results from the survey are illustrated in Table 6.

Table 6. Teachers views on constructivist student-centered Social Studies curriculum

Ways the Social Studies curriculum can stimulate active learning	SD	D	N	A	SA
The Social Studies curriculum should place learners at the center of teaching and learning	2 (1.3%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (1.3%)	47 (31.1%)	100 (66.2%)
The Social Studies programmes should provide a variety of rich teaching and learning activities	1 (0.7%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (1.3%)	64 (42.4%)	84 (55.6%)
The Social Studies programmes should offer students opportunities to design a hypothesis, mine data, analyze the data, test the hypothesis and draw conclusions supported by evidence	3 (2.0%)	4 (2.6%)	12 (7.9%)	67 (44.4%)	65 (43.0%)
The Social Studies course must encourage learners to be involved in a variety of learning projects	0 (0.0%)	2 (1.3%)	7 (4.6%)	72 (47.7%)	70 (46.4%)
The Social Studies curriculum should be sufficient, flexible, varied and involve all categories of learners	1 (0.7%)	4 (2.6%)	7 (4.6%)	69 (45.7%)	70 (46.4%)
The Social Studies curriculum must incorporate activities that contribute to learners' perceptions of teachers as fellow inquirers	2 (1.3%)	13 (8.6%)	19 (12.6%)	62 (41.1%)	55 (36.4%)
The Social Studies courses should create a conducive climate that fosters students' self-respect and respect for others	0 (0.0%)	2 (1.3%)	3 (2.0%)	76 (50.3%)	70 (46.4%)
The Social Studies curriculum should support learners to probe and respond to human conditions in the contemporary world	0 (0.0%)	4 (2.6%)	3 (2.0%)	73 (48.3%)	71 (47.0%)
The Social Studies curriculum must stimulate students to participate in a variety of whole class, small groups, or individual activities	1 (0.7%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (2.6%)	58 (38.4%)	88 (58.3%)
Contemporary Social Studies courses should employ a variety of workspaces to facilitate the size of groups, diversity of class activities and integration of technology into teaching and learning	2 (1.3%)	1 (0.7%)	5 (3.3%)	67 (44.4%)	76 (50.3%)

Key: SD-Strongly Disagree, D-Disagree, N-Neutral, A-Agree, SA-Strongly Agree
Field survey (2022)

Teachers provided varied responses on what should constitute a constructivist student-centered Social Studies curriculum. However, the majority of the respondents agreed that the current curriculum of Social Studies should be redesigned to make it more student-centered as captured in Table 6. More specifically, the Social Studies curriculum should place learners at the center of teaching and learning (Agree = 31.1%, Strongly Agree = 66.2%). This finding contradicts those of Dwomoh (2018), whose study on Social Studies/History curricula in Ghana concluded that Ghana still holds the assertion of learning by rote, which is a traditional type of learning and assessment even in the instruction of history. Finally, a contemporary Social Studies course should employ a variety of workspaces to facilitate the size of groups, diversity of class activities and integration of technology into the teaching and learning of Social Studies content (Agree = 44.4%, Strongly Agree = 50.3%). Content is used here in the context of reflective thinking, which is different from textbooks' content. Content is used here to mean an instrument for improving the quality of learners' decision-making processes. Students use knowledge and skills while solving problems. But the issue is not just the knowledge, but rather decision-making and thinking skills that are grounded on problem-solving and scientific reflection (Doğanay, 2002).

4. Conclusions

From the findings, it can be concluded that Social Studies teachers within the study area have a positive perception of a meaningful Social Studies curriculum. They advocated that the new Social Studies curriculum should engage students in the formulation of educational goals, selection of instructional strategies and assessment of learning outcomes; focus on the psychological and developmental needs of students; place emphasis on the social world, its challenges, strengths, and its prospects; and finally, it should put emphasis on contemporary, enduring and pervasive social problems and link them to students' real-life situations.

Teachers also shared their views on how to make Social Studies instruction inclusive and challenging to stimulate the acquisition of learning skills like critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, leadership, communication, resilience and collaboration among learners. They strongly called for redesigning the Social Studies curriculum to offer learners challenging content, instructional activities and assessment of learning outcomes; provide learners the opportunity to engage in reflective discussion as they listen carefully and respond to each other's views to find solutions to problems; emphasize on the core competences, values, and desirable attitudes needed for national development; and finally, integrate technology into teaching and learning to equip students with digital literacy.

Finally, teachers supported calls to make the new Social Studies curriculum for SHSs constructivist and student-centered. They agreed with the assertion that to promote active learning, the Social Studies curriculum should place learners at the center of teaching and learning; offer students opportunities to design a hypothesis, collect data, interpret the data, test the hypothesis and draw conclusions supported by evidence; encourage learners to be involved in a variety of learning projects; be sufficient, flexible, varied and involve all categories of learners; and integrate activities that contribute to learners' perceptions of teachers as fellow inquirers.

5. Recommendations

From the conclusions drawn, the following recommendations have been made:

1. Government of Ghana through the Ministry of Education should redesign the current SHS Social Studies curriculum to create room for equitable, active, student-centered and problem-based learning.
2. Ministry of Education through the Ghana Education Service should organize periodic training and continuous professional development programmes for Social Studies teachers in SHSs to build their capacity on how to deliver technology-based, 21st century student-centered teaching to improve students learning outcomes in tandem with Sustainable Development Goal 4.
3. Government of Ghana in collaboration with local and international partners should expand the infrastructure of all SHSs in the Northern Region of Ghana to decongest the classrooms for effective and meaningful teaching and learning.

4. Ghana Education Service should supply SHSs with relevant instructional resources such as maps, charts, graphs, smart boards, TV sets, projectors, and digital videos and audios, among others, to enable teachers to facilitate student-centered and active learning in classrooms to improve students' learning outcomes.

5. Ghana Education Service should rethink the policy that bans SHS students from using mobile phones on campuses to permit them to use technology in schools to improve their learning outcomes.

Ethical approval

As demanded in every social research, when conducting a study of this nature, there is the need to observe ethical codes guiding the study (Creswell, 2014). In this study, at the stages of data collection, the researchers applied to the Dean, Faculty of Education, University for Development Studies who approved the study. The principal researcher then wrote to the Northern Regional Director of Education requesting permission to carry out the study in the SHSs in the region which was approved. That approval letter was then used to obtain permission from the heads of the sample schools before data collection.

Informed consent

Social Studies teachers who participated in the study did so voluntarily. They were not monetarily induced nor coerced to take part in the study. Participating in the study did pose any threat to their safety and well-being. All information provided was kept confidential and was applied only for this research. This manuscript did not disclose the identity of those teachers who participated in the study. Their identity has been kept confidential.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest. The research team did not obtain funding for the study. As a result, there was no possibility of an internal or external donor influencing the outcome of the study or determining whether to publish the findings of the research or not. All errors remain the authors own.

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