

Ghanaian teacher trainees' perception of the official Social Studies curriculum and the resources available for its implementation

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Abstract

This paper examines teacher trainees' perception of the nature, usefulness and adequacy of the official Social Studies curriculum prescribed by the syllabus issued by the Teacher Education Division of the Ghana Education Service. Using simple random sampling and stratified sampling methods, a sample of 233 students was selected from six Teacher Training Colleges in the Ashanti Region. A questionnaire consisting of mostly Likert-type items was used; and trainees were made to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the statements about the official Social Studies curriculum and the resources available for its implementation. The results show that over 90% of the trainees agreed the objectives of the social studies curriculum are valid and very necessary for the programme; they were very much aware that the purpose of Social Studies education is to train them to teach at the basic level; and agreed that the subject equips them with skills to teach at the basic level. On the content of Social Studies, the trainees agreed tremendously about its relevance. They were however undecided about the limitless scope of the subject which makes it uncomfortable to learn. The trainees also showed a high level of agreement with the need for a Social Studies room with materials like globes, charts, bulletin boards; and demonstrated grave disagreement with the adequacy of Social Studies textbooks and other reference materials.

Keywords official curriculum, implemented curriculum, social studies teaching recourses

Introduction

Knowledge of a subject area is paramount to students of that field of study. This would help them grasp the importance of the subject, and ensure commitment to its study. This research examined students' knowledge of Social Studies with respect to its objectives, content and scope. Objectives of a subject can be explained operationally as an intended behavioural change, which a learner is expected to exhibit after undergoing a learning experience (Yakubu, 2000). The content of a subject is said to be the body of knowledge or information, which is presented to students. According to Jarolimek (1984), the scope of Social Studies refers to the range of substantive content, values, skills and/or learner experiences to be included in a programme. Scope is thus seen as the breadth of a programme.

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Many Social Studies educationists in Ghana believe that Social Studies was introduced into the school curriculum with the intention of solving social problems which bedeviled the Ghanaian society. This view is stressed in the junior secondary school Social Studies syllabus. According to a Ghana Education Service (GES) report:

The subject deals with societal problems relating to the survival of the individual and society. Society is a dynamic and an ever-changing entity, and so are societal problems (GES, 1998, p: ii).

It is expected that knowledge of Social Studies will assist students to understand the way of life of their society and enable them function effectively.

It is common knowledge that the availability of teaching/learning materials and resources helps tutors and students to gain understanding in Social Studies (Matthias, 1973; Jarolimek and Parker, 1997). The teaching/learning facilities make the teacher's work easier by reducing writing and chalking in the classroom. Learning is made practical and vivid; what learners learn has lasting impressions on their mind (Tamakloe, Atta, and Amedahe, 1996).

The objectives of the study on which this paper is derived was to find out how trainees in teacher training colleges perceived the objectives, content and scope of the Social Studies curriculum as well as their understanding of how Social Studies would help in the resolution of social problems. Also, the study sought to find the adequacy and effectiveness of teaching-learning facilities in the teacher training colleges.

Conceptual Issues

Students must have understanding in the programme they pursue in order to make reflective decision and to participate effectively in daily social activities. Such understanding must constitute facts, generalisations, skills, hypotheses, beliefs, and attitudes that students and teachers construct in social education programmes (Martorella, 1991).

The acquisition of "understanding" is mostly seen as a "cognitive" activity, though its component parts enclose all aspects of human learning, i.e. cognitive; affective and psychomotor. "Understanding" in a Social Studies class involves some mix of the head, the heart and the hand –knowledge, affection and skills. It is emphasised that understanding does not exist independent of learning. It arises from students' interactions with others within their social milieu (Resnick, 1981; Stanley & Mathews, (1985).

Educationists have expressed their understanding on the meaning of Social Studies. Preston and Hermans (198, p3) write that "Social Studies is the name commonly given to the curriculum area that embraces the social sciences. The field is enormous. Everything about human beings and their environment provides potential Social Studies content". To them, everything that is known and taught concerning social behaviour comes into the purview of Social Studies.

Other writers stress the integrative nature of Social Studies. For instance, Bar, Barth and Shermis (1977, p69) state that "social studies is an integration of human relations for the purpose of citizenship education". The African Social and Environmental Studies Programme (ASESP) (1994,p 5) views Social Studies as the integration of concepts in the sciences and

humanities for the purpose of promoting and practising effective problem-solving, decision - making, citizenship skills on social, political and economic issues and problems.

Other writers stress content of Social Studies. Hayford (1992) writes that Social Studies focuses on the interrelations and interactions of people in all corners of the society: past, present and future. Social studies could equip students with knowledge, values, and skills essential for human survival. Thus, the learning experiences at the levels of education whether basic, second cycle or tertiary should be drawn not only for academic considerations but to enable people become informed, humane, rational and participating citizens.

Tamakloe (1991,p45) advocates that the structure of the content selected for teaching and learning processes in Social Studies must be such that it cuts across disciplines. He posits that

This can be made possible if the content is thematic in nature. Themes such as "The School - Community", "Our Continent" and others like "Citizenship," "Cooperation", "Inter dependence" and "Nationalism" easily lend themselves to the type of organization which relies heavily on the use of concepts, facts, skills and values from various disciplines for the explanation, discussion and generalizations drawn for thorough explanation.

Available literature has also revealed understanding about the nature of Social Studies. The nature of Social Studies demands that knowledge be presented in a holistic manner and that all disciplines must promote one's understanding of issues and solutions to problems (Tamakloe 1991). This pre-supposes that there are no rigid lines that separate one subject, say economics from geography and that all issues should be treated in an integrated way. It is common saying that young students in their natural learning should not be put in watertight compartments. This emanates from the fact that their knowledge is the outcome of numerous experiences each contributing some new features to what they know. This is made possible through integration (Lucan, 1981). By nature, Social Studies views knowledge as a whole rather than as separate and disjointed entities (Grasha, 1985; Mathias, 1973; and Tamakloe, 1991).

The understanding of the scope of Social Studies varies from writer to writer and from country to country. Educationists for instance, who met to discuss Social Studies education in Africa at the Endicott Summerhouse in Massachusetts, considered the scope of Social Studies to be the integration of Geography; History, and Civics. Banks (1985), in contrast to the views of the Summer House Conference on the scope of the Social Studies, posits that at lower grades, the scope of Social Studies is based on institutions and communities such as the home, the family, the school, the neighbourhood and the community. He points out further that at the higher levels, a variety of elective courses such as Sociology, Psychology and the problems of democracy are offered. Melinger and Daves (1981) believe that the broad field of Social Studies has accredited social importance, but stress that the subject lacks a consistently discernible heart. But the field provides fertile grounds for unbounded advocacy.

On the objectives of Social Studies, many educationists have expressed divergent opinions. However, many Social Studies advocates stress citizenship education as the prime objective of the subject (Banks 1980, Aggarwal 1982). Martorella (1985) expresses that the basic purpose of Social Studies is to develop reflective, competent and concerned citizens. He adds that the focus of Social Studies is to develop the head, the hand and the heart. This means that the

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main concern of Social Studies is to help educands to develop the abilities and skills to meet challenges that confront them. It is against this background that the GES (1988) states the objectives of junior secondary school Social Studies as the reflection of Bloom's (1956) taxonomy of education which stresses cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains.

In a similar vein, the 3-year post-secondary teacher training colleges Social Studies syllabus (GES, 1993, p1) in an attempt to equip the teacher trainees with the subject content, the professional knowledge and skills to handle the Social Studies programme at the basic level. Thus,

Our goal in teaching School Social studies in the Teacher Training College should be to help students to acquire knowledge and to effect a change in their attitudes and values in their society and the environment. It is also to equip them with the skills to teach for change in values and attitudes of pupils.

Teacher Education

Agyeman (1991) described Teacher Education as a special kind of apprenticeship in which teacher trainee are trained to master three forms of cognitive skills, namely:

- (i) The subject to be taught by the student teacher when he becomes a teacher
- (ii) The philosophy of the teaching profession and
- (iii) The code of ethics of the profession.

With the Education Reform in 1987, Social Studies has been re-introduced into the teacher training colleges to equip trainee teachers with skills to cope with the varying conditions in the classroom and the environment (Tamakloe, 1987).

The dedication and commitment of the pre-service teachers of social studies, and indeed teachers in general, when they graduate are an essential ingredient in the success of any educational system. Bishop (1985) submits that a curriculum is only as good as the quality of its teachers. It is against this back drop that how teacher trainees perceive and imbibe the issues taught in the social studies programme need to be sought. This information will be essential in the assessment of the appropriateness of the curriculum.

The Ghana Education Service has stressed that all teacher-training institutions in Ghana are to prepare their students to teach integrated Social Studies instead of the separate subjects of History and Geography. In a study on the status of Social Studies in teacher training institutions, Tamakloe (1988) found that 74% of the institutions taught social studies as separate subjects of history, geography and civics, instead of integrated social studies.

Other studies in Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria and Uganda (Merryfield, 1986, Odada 1988; Okoh 1979) have demonstrated that those persons most directly responsible for the implementation of a Social Studies programmes, (student-teachers and teacher educators), were not clear about its meaning and how it differed from the separate subjects of Geography, History and Civics. There is evidence, however, that clarity of the subject can be enhanced by effective pre-service and in-service education programmes (Adeyemi, 1985; Barth, 1986).

Statement of the Problem

Social Studies was introduced into the Ghanaian teacher training programme in 1987. The subject is thus comparatively new to many of the experienced college tutors who were trained in the teaching of constituent single subjects. The relative newness of the Social Studies programme in Ghana's educational system poses problems to some of the students in teacher training colleges as regards understanding and appreciating the curriculum. The researchers' interaction with trainees at the St. Monica's Training College in Ashanti Mampong in 1998 revealed that even some who had background knowledge in Geography, Economics and History were not very sure about the scope of Social Studies curriculum.

At a workshop organised at one of the colleges in 1996 for all tutors in the training colleges in the Ashanti Region, comments gathered from some of the students underscored the problem of understanding some issues in Social Studies. For instance, the students mentioned the scope of Social Studies as being too broad. Consequently, understanding of the subject by students in the training colleges may be different from what is expected by the official curriculum. These informed the need for this study.

Objectives of the Study

The study examined students' understanding of the Social Studies programme at the teacher training college level. Specifically, the study sought to:

- i. examine students' perception on the objectives, content, and scope of Social Studies.
- ii. investigate students' perception of the adequacy of teaching and learning facilities and materials for Social Studies education.

Method

A sample of the 650 final year students from the selected teacher training colleges in the Ashanti region, 240 students (37% of the total population.) were selected. The choice of sample size of 240 was based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table for determining sample sizes from a given population. In each of the six teacher training colleges in the Ashanti region offering social studies, 37% of the total population was selected, thereby giving a proportional representation to the colleges selected for the study.

Research Instrument

The research instrument was a questionnaire consisting of 53 items. The questionnaire touched on background information of the students, objectives, content and scope of Social Studies, general information about Social Studies, and knowledge about integration in the field of study and teaching- learning materials and facilities. Questionnaires were distributed to the 240 students. In all, 233 questionnaires were retrieved. Therefore, the return rate was 97%.

The items on the questionnaire were structured along the lines of the Likert-type scale. The statements on the Likert-type scale were expressed on a five-point scale, which requested respondents to indicate the extent of their agreement/disagreement ranging from Strongly

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Agree (SA), Agree (A), Uncertain (U), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (DS). The extent of their agreement/disagreement was scored from Strongly Agree (5) through Strongly Disagree (1).

Findings and Discussion

Percentages were used in the analyses of data. The major findings and discussions were put under three broad headings: student's perception of objectives, content and scope of Social Studies; the relevance of Social Studies of finding solutions to social problems; and teaching-learning materials and facilities.

Student perception of objectives, content and scope of Social Studies

Table 1 shows the mean ratings of the trainees' agreement with the as of aspects of the social studies syllabus.

Table 1 Mean rating of students' agreement with objectives, content and scope of the social studies syllabus

Aspects of Social Studies Syllabus	Mean rating of agreement
1.1. Social Studies aims at equipping teacher trainees with professional knowledge.	4.52
1.2. Social Studies equips students with skills to teach at the basic level	4.52
1.3. Social Studies helps students to develop good values and attitudes	4.60
1.4. Social Studies aims at giving citizenship education to learners.	4.70
1.5. The content of Social Studies cuts across disciplines	4.55
1.6. The limitless scope of Social Studies makes it uncomfortable to learners.	3.42

The table shows that except for Item 1.6, which concerns the scope of the subject, the trainees showed a high level of agreement with all aspects – objectives, content and scope – of the social studies syllabus. That is, in each case over 90% of the trainees agreed the objectives are valid and very necessary for the programme; except for its scope that 52% agree makes it uncomfortable to learners.

Trainees' agreement (mean rating 4.52) with the first objective (Item 1.1) is in agreement with the assertion of Martorella (1985) and Aggarwal (1982) that Social Studies as a discipline aims at equipping students with knowledge. It implies that since students knew Social Studies is capable of equipping them with the desired knowledge to meet challenges that confront them as stated in the 3-year post secondary teacher training college social studies syllabus (GES, 1993), they would make conscious effort in learning the subject. It also implies that since the students are aware of the purpose for which they are pursuing their course, they would have no excuse to go and teach the subject when they are posted after their service education.

Trainees' agreement (mean rating 4.52) with the second objective (Item 1.2) clearly demonstrates the students agreed to the statement that Social Studies equips them with skills to teach at the basic level. This finding also suggests that students were very aware that the purpose of Social Studies education is to train them to teach at the basic level. This is in

conformity with the objective of 3-year Post-secondary Teacher Training College syllabus (GES, 1993).

On the content of Social Studies, the trainees agreed tremendously that the subject

- cuts across disciplines (Item 1.5; mean rating 4.55)
- helps students to develop good values and attitudes (Item 1.3; mean rating 4.60) and
- aims at giving citizenship education to learners (Item 1.4; mean rating 4.70).

However, their agreement was highest on giving citizenship education. An important objective of Social Studies is to give citizenship education. The highest mean observed here shows that the students agreed with this objective. Generally, it can be said that the students knew that Social Studies aims at giving citizenship education. This affirms the findings of Superka et al, 1980; Aggarwal, 1980; Barth, 1983; Banks 1985 that the function of citizenship education is the primary goal of Social Studies in the school curriculum. It is expected pre-service teachers would teach issues in citizenship so that students become law-abiding

Trainees' agreement (mean rating 3.42) with Item 6, the limitless scope of the subject making it uncomfortable to learn, was low. This indicates most students were either undecided or disagreed with the statement. But the fact that about 52% indicated they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement has implications for social studies educators or tutors in the colleges. The limitless nature agreed the trainees corroborates the position of Aggarwal (1982), Beard (1963) and Bar et al (1977). For instance, Aggarwal (1982, p4) notes that "the scope of Social Studies is very vast and wide and in fact as wide as the world itself and as lengthy as history of man on his earth". In assisting students to cope with the limitless scope of Social Studies, Aggarwal (1982:40) states "its frontiers have to be encompassed so as to provide an overall integrated outline from various disciplines".

Teaching-Learning Materials and Facilities

Since the inception of the Social Studies programme in Africa, teachers and learners have consistently complained about the quantity and quality of materials for Social Studies (Africa Social Studies Programme, 1985). Instructional materials have great influence on students' understanding of Social Studies. Attempts were made to seek the opinions of students on the availability of instructional materials such as textbooks, teaching-learning materials, Social Studies room and other equipment.

Students' agreement with availability of teaching learning materials and facilities for teaching social studies in colleges is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Students' agreement with availability of teaching learning materials and facilities for teaching social studies in colleges

Teaching learning materials and facilities	Mean rating of agreement on availability
2.1 Provision of Social Studies room is a must in all Teacher Training Colleges	4.62
2.2 Social Studies room should contain materials like globes, charts, bulletin boards	4.88
2.3 The absence of Social Studies room prevents me from understanding Social Studies.	3.64
2.4 Social Studies text-books are sufficient in my college	1.14
2.5 Other materials apart from Social Studies textbooks are there to help me to understand Social Studies	2.42

Table 2 shows that the trainees showed a high level of agreement with provision of Social Studies room (Item 2.1) and materials like globes, charts, bulletin boards in such rooms (Item 2.2). Out of the 233 respondents, 183 (78.5%) admitted that the social Studies room is a must in all teacher-training colleges. This finding supports Aggarwal (1982) who stresses the necessity of a Social Studies room in all the teacher-training colleges where social Studies is taught. The students further admitted that the Social Studies room should contain materials like globes, charts and bulletin boards. The provision of a social studies room will give the students "a place of their own" where materials specifically designed for Social Studies could be stored.

But 88 respondents (37.8%) agreed to the statement that the absence of a Social Studies room prevented them from understanding Social Studies. The mean agreement (3.64) over the statement that 'absence of Social Studies room prevents me from understanding Social Studies', indicates the majority was rather undecided on this. This has implications for social studies educators since Mofat (as cited in Aggarwal, 1982), pointed out that classroom furnishings and their arrangements have direct bearing upon the quality of results obtained from students supports.

Table 2 also shows that the trainees showed a very low level of agreement with provision of Social Studies textbooks (Item 2.4) and other Social Studies reference materials (Item 2.5). 136 respondents (58.4%) of strongly disagreed to the statement. The mean rating of 1.14 obtained shows their disagreement that Social Studies textbooks were sufficient in the colleges. The students further admitted that other materials such as globes, wall maps and rain gauges were not available in the training colleges. One tends to wonder how a programme that is acclaimed to solve societal issues (GES, 1988) should be implemented without textbooks and other instructional materials. It would not be strange therefore if the students develop negative attitudes to towards Social Studies.

Discussion

The revelation of the paucity of textbooks is no different from the observations made by Merryfield (1986) with respect to Malawi and Nigeria. Merryfield stated that textbooks for students were non-existent in the teacher training colleges. The findings also confirm the observations made by Lijembe (1983) and Oshungbohun (1984) that there were inadequate textbooks and this limited effective social studies instruction in Africa.

One tends to believe that the shortage of textbooks might be attributed to the fact that most countries in Africa moved more quickly in instructing teachers to teach Social Studies than in providing them with textbooks with which to teach (Merryfield and Mutebi, 1991). The lack of textbooks on Social Studies may result in students not getting the general survey or unit of an information base of the subject, reference and other bibliographical materials for sources of additional information (Cobbold, 1999).

Conclusion and recommendations

The overall conclusion is that the students in the selected teacher training colleges in Ghana had had understanding of the Social Studies programme in terms of objectives, content and scope; as well as the integrated nature of the subject and its usefulness in the resolution of social problems.

Once the students have understood the issues in the course they are pursuing, their views should be considered in designing the Social studies programme. If one accepts the assumption that what one is interested in greatly affects the quantity and quality of his learning, it follows that students' view at various ages and developmental levels should be considered in designing the Social Studies programme. Though students' views must be considered in the design and appraised to find out if they are in line with or would lead to the welfare of students.

In designing a Social Studies programme, consideration should be given to the provision of teaching-learning materials such as textbooks and a Social Studies room. The finding of the study revealed that the unavailability of Social Studies textbooks and a Social Studies room in particular affected the teaching and learning in the Training Colleges. Care should therefore be taken to avoid rushing the process of any curriculum design no matter the time constraints and the pressure from policy makers. It must be emphasized that no matter how good teachers are, certain educational materials should be provided in the colleges to make the trainees function as good, qualified and effective teachers.

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