

Influence of Social Studies Teachers Mastery of the Subject Matter on Students' Performance in Kaduna State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study titled, Influence of Social Studies Teachers Subject Matter Mastery on Students' Academic Performance in Kaduna State, Nigeria. The study had one objective, one research question, and one null hypothesis. The objective was to determine the influence of social studies teachers' subject matter mastery on students' academic performance in Kaduna State, Nigeria. The study covered only social studies teachers within the three (3) senatorial zones of Kaduna State, namely zone one (1) Northern Kaduna, zone two (2) Kaduna Central and zone three (3) Southern Kaduna. The study reviewed related literature on constructivist theory, and some empirical studies. The study adopted descriptive survey design. Two thousand, two hundred and seventy-one (2, 271) social studies teachers of public secondary schools formed the population of the study. A total of three hundred (300) social studies teachers selected from thirty (30) public secondary schools were sampled based on stratified sampling technique. The study adopted the stratified sampling technique. The instrument used to collect data was a fixed response questionnaire designed by the researcher. Frequency and percentages were used in analyzing the respondents' opinions, while one sample t-test was used to test the hypothesis at $P < 0.05$ level of significance for acceptance or rejection and the hypothesis was rejected. The findings revealed that, social studies teachers' mastery of the subject matter have positive influence on the findings. It was recommended that focus should be made on organizing workshops on subject matter knowledge/mastery so as to solve the problem of subject of matter mastery.

Keywords: Social Studies, Teachers, Mastery of the Subject Matter, Students' Performance.

Introduction

Education is an important instrument for achieving national development. It is through the process of education that mastery is generated for the transformation and advancement of both the individual and the society at large. It is thus the building block for social, economic and industrial development of any nation. The level of sophistication attained by various countries as regards poverty reduction, self-reliance, scientific, economic and technological development cannot be deprived from gigantic strives made in the educational system and indeed the level of competency and effectiveness of the teachers who are the main implementers and translators of educational policies (Obadara, 2011).

Every educational system at all levels depends heavily on teachers' competence for the execution of government educational programmes. Teachers are highly essential for successful operation of the educational system and also important tool for educational development. Teachers have shown to have important influence on students' academic performance and they also play a crucial role in educational attainment because the teacher is ultimately responsible for translating policy into actions and principles based on practice during interaction with students. Both teaching and learning depends on professionally trained teachers (Uchefuna, 2001).

Professionally trained teachers need an understanding of the subject matter so that they will not only understand how those core ideas, but know how to structure those ideas and understanding how those ideas relate to each other. Teachers also need mastery of development that can formulate productive learning experiences by understanding children's/adolescents' thinking, behaviours, interest and current mastery as well as understanding the troubles, they might experience with particular context. Teachers must be able to understand how to support further growth in a number of domains – social, physical and emotional as well as cognitive. The teacher chooses the mastery and the required skills to transmit or impart to the learners. Teachers should cultivate the right attitude, be dedicated to duty and professionally qualified. This will help teachers to teach students successfully. Teachers need to be academically qualified as well as professionally competent to be able to perform in their post.

Statement of the Problem

The responsibility of teaching social studies successfully rests on the shoulders of those who specialize in the subject. But, today many teachers teaching social studies in Nigerian schools are not social studies specialists, but specialists in subjects like History, Geography, and other social sciences, According to Guga and Bawa (2012), many schools employ untrained teachers to teach various subjects. Some of such teachers know what to teach but find it difficult to teach. Some of them do not know what to teach. Even among the social studies teachers, some possess some generic pedagogical skills yet have limited subject matter mastery, while some possess a sustainable amount of subject matter mastery, yet unable to design and implement instructional methods and teaching skills to enhance students' learning due to lack of pedagogical abilities (White, 2000).

In view of the above-mentioned problems, this study aimed at examining the influence of social studies teachers' mastery of the subject matter on students' performance in Kaduna State, Nigeria.

Research Question

The research question for this study is; to what extent does subject matter mastery of the teacher influence students' performance in social studies in Kaduna State?

Hypothesis

Social studies teachers' mastery of the subject matter has no significant influence on students' performance in Kaduna State, Nigeria.

Review of Related Literature

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted constructivist theory as a guide to the study. Constructivist (Constructivism) theory emphasizes the importance of active involvement of learners in constructing mastery for themselves and building new ideas on concept based upon current mastery and past experiences. Constructivism is recognized as a unique learning theory in itself. As a theory of learning, it focused on learners ability to mentally construct meaning of their own minds through learning. The theory believes that all humans have the ability to construct mastery in their own minds through a process of discovery and problem solving. The extent to which this process can take place naturally without structure and teaching is defining factors. Amongst the advocates of this learning theory is Mukherjee (2002). Constructivism does not call in question the value of instruction as such. The constructionist attitude to teaching is not at all dismissive because it is minimalist, the goal is to teach

in such a way as to produce the most learning for the least teaching, Mukhejee (2002). This theory is relevant to this study in the sense that, the theory identified some expectations of teachers in this 21st century.

Empirical Studies

Substantial researchers suggest that, school quality is enhanced when teachers have high academic skills, teach in the field they are trained, have more than a few years of experience, have mastery of the subject matter and have participated in high quality induction and professional development programmes, (Mayer, 2000). Increasingly, researches confirm that, capable teachers are essential link between public aspiration for high quality schooling and students' academic performance. Some researchers that are relevant to this study were reviewed so as to determine their relevance and differences in findings.

Abioye and Sunday (2014) conducted a study on the impact of teachers' subject matter mastery and questioning behaviour on students' performance in English language in selected secondary schools in Ikere metropolis. The findings of the study revealed that subject matter mastery of teachers is significant and necessary for students' performance in English language. In another study conducted by Nakpodia (2011) titled teacher factors in the implementation of Universal Basic Education programme in junior secondary schools in the South Senatorial District of Delta State. The factors examined in the study in relation to the implementation of Universal Basic Education includes teachers' experience (subject matter mastery), and professional training. The findings of the study revealed that, there is no significant difference between experienced and less experienced teachers in the implementation of UBE programmes.

Emmanuel (2003) conducted a study on the influence of teacher factors on academic performance of secondary school students in Ogun State, Nigeria. The objective of the study was to examine the relationship between teacher factors and students' academic performance. The findings of the study indicated that, teacher's factors subject matter mastery inclusive when taken together were significantly related to students' academic performance.

Methodology

The research design for this study was descriptive survey that involves a description of the influence of social studies teachers' mastery of the subject matter on student's performance in Kaduna State, Nigeria. This design was employed because there is no feasibility of experimentation since the events had already taken place. This study involved gathering data about the target population from a sample and then generalizing the findings from the analysis of the sample proportionate to the entire population.

The population for this study was made up of all social studies teachers in Kaduna State, Nigeria, put together at two thousand, two hundred and seventy one (2, 271) across the three senatorial zones of the state as at the time of the conduct of this study.

The sample for this study was done using stratified random sampling. Thirty (30) junior secondary schools were selected across the inspectorate divisions of the state. This is in line with Nwana (2011), who asserted that a population of 10% and above can form the sample for a study, here hundred (300) social studies teachers were proportionally drawn from the thirty (30) sampled schools.

The instrument used for data collection was questionnaire tagged subject matter mastery questionnaire design for social studies teachers. The questionnaire contained questions that might be called in an interview. The questionnaire was divided into sections. The first section consists of

the teachers' demographic characteristics required for the study. The other section contained items on the influence of social studies teachers' mastery of the subject matter on student's performance in Kaduna State.

After constructing the questionnaire, the researcher ensured its content validity by checking the instrument with the objective and hypotheses of the study to ensure that the measuring instrument measured truly and accurately what it is intended to measure. The questionnaire tested were sorted and coded and was subjected to Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. The procedures adopted for the determination of the reliability co-efficient include Guttman split half. The reliability obtained was 0.65. An instrument can be said to be reliable when the reliability co-efficient can be approximated to one (1) or close to one. This is in line with Nworgu (2006), who stated that, the closer the instrument to one (1), the more reliable it is.

The data was collected with the help of two (2) trained research assistants in all the sampled schools. The distribution of the questionnaire was done by the researcher and the two trained research assistants across the sampled schools and the retrieval was done by both the researcher and the research assistants.

The data collected were subjected to statistical analysis. Statistical analysis used were frequencies, and percentages for the analysis of demographic variables, and express opinion on the main variables. Influential statistics, mainly one sample t-test was used to test the hypothesis. The hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Description of Study Variables

Three hundred (300) social studies teachers selected from 30 junior secondary schools across the three senatorial zones of Kaduna State were involved in this study. Out of the three hundred (300) questionnaires distributed, two hundred and sixty six (266) were returned and used in the analysis. The variables selected along teachers' opinions on the subject of investigation were gender, age, highest academic qualification, marital status, area of specialization and years of working experience. These variables were considered to be directly associated with the teachers; perception of the influence of social studies teacher's mastery of the subject matter on students' performance. Each of the variable was classified in frequencies and percentages in the table below.

Table 1: Classifications of the teachers by their areas of specialization

Areas of specialization	Frequency	Percent
Social Studies	233	87.6
Geography/Social studies	20	7.5
Other areas	13	3.0
Total	266	100.0

The major areas of specialization of the teachers was social studies and this accounted for 233(87.6%) of the total number of teachers involved in the study. Other areas of specialization represented by the teachers were a combination of Geography and social studies with 20(7.5%) of the teachers. But there were 13(3.0%) of the teachers that majored in other subject areas. This distribution means that most of the teachers were trained in social studies and supposedly had good mastery of the subject of investigation and could therefore give valid information on the investigated variables.

Table 2: Classification of the teachers by their years of teaching experience

Years of teaching experience	Frequency	Percent
1 -4yrs	61	22.9
5 - 10yrs	91	34.2
11 - 15yrs	71	26.7
Above 15yrs	43	16.2
Total	266	100.0

The table above shows that only 61(22.9%) of the teachers had (1-4years) less than 5years of teaching experience in their various schools. Those with 5 to 10years of teaching experiences were 91(34.2%) while 71(26.7%) had between 11 and 15years of experience on the job. But 43(16.2%) had more than 15years of teaching experience. This distribution means that most of the teachers were in a better position to give valid information on the influence of social studies teachers' mastery of the subject matter on students' performance in the selected schools.

Test of Hypothesis

The null hypotheses formulated to establish the significance of social studies teachers' mastery of the subject matter on students' performance was tested with one sample t-test procedure. This was informed by the need to test the mean opinion with a midpoint average of 3.00 which would indicate the respondents' agreement with the significance of the influence or disagreement. The hypothesis was tested at the probability level of 0.05.

Hypothesis: Social studies teachers' mastery of the subject matter has no significant influence on students' performance in Kaduna State, Nigeria.

The mean scores of the respondents on social studies teachers' mastery of the subject matter's influence on students' performance was examined and tested for significance. The aggregate mean was compared with a t-test mean which would indicate whether the respondents considered the variable to have significant influence on the students' performance or not. The midpoint of 3.00 was used as the test mean. A summary of the result is presented in the table below.

Table 3: One sample t-test on social studies teachers' mastery of the subject matter on students' performance

Variables	N	Mean	S D	t-cal.	DF	α	t-critical	Decision
Teachers' mastery of the subject matter	266	3.81	0.845	15.680	265	.000	1.96	Rejected
Test mean	266	3.00	0.000	0.000				

The result in the table showed that, the respondents were of the opinion that teachers' mastery of the subject matter have significant influence on students' performance in social studies at the Junior Secondary Schools of Kaduna state. The observed t-value for the test is 15.680 obtained at 265 degree of freedom compared with the critical value of 1.96 at the same degree of freedom. The observed level of significance for the test is 0.000 ($P < 0.05$). The mean score of 3.81 clearly indicated the respondents agree with the opinion. With these observations there is enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis. The null hypothesis which stated that teachers' mastery of the subject matter has no significant influence on students' academic performance in Kaduna State. The result showed

that teachers' mastery of social studies has influence on students' academic performance in Kaduna State.

Discussion of Findings

This study examined the influence of social studies teachers' mastery of the subject matter on students' performance in Kaduna State, Nigeria. The null hypothesis was tested in line with the research question. In the test of the hypothesis, the opinions of the teachers on mastery of the subject matter was found to have significant influence on students' performance in social studies. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. This means that, teachers that have mastery of the subject matter are more likely to ensure good performance, while those without subject matter mastery are likely to promote poor academic performance. These findings agree with Hathie (2003), who observed that the teacher accounts for about thirty percent of variance in students' achievement and that teachers' mastery, skills and attitude are instrumental in creating the conditions for learners. The findings of this study is also in line with Abioye and Sunday (2014) who revealed that teachers' subject matter mastery is significant and necessary for students' performance in English language. These findings are also in line with Emmanuel (2003), who indicated that teacher factors when taken together were significantly related to students' academic performance.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that subject matter mastery have significant influence on students' academic performance in social studies in Kaduna State, Nigeria. This is a positive pointer towards improving the performance not only in social studies but also in other subjects.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion obtained from this study, it was recommended that;

- i. Government at all levels should focus on improving social studies teachers' performance through workshops on subject matter mastery.
- ii. Teachers should be given subjects to teach according to their areas of specialization so as to promote subject matter mastery.
- iii. Social studies teachers should always make sure that, they study every concept before entering their classes to teach for effective subject matter mastery.
- iv. Issues of mentorship should be encouraged among secondary school teachers.

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