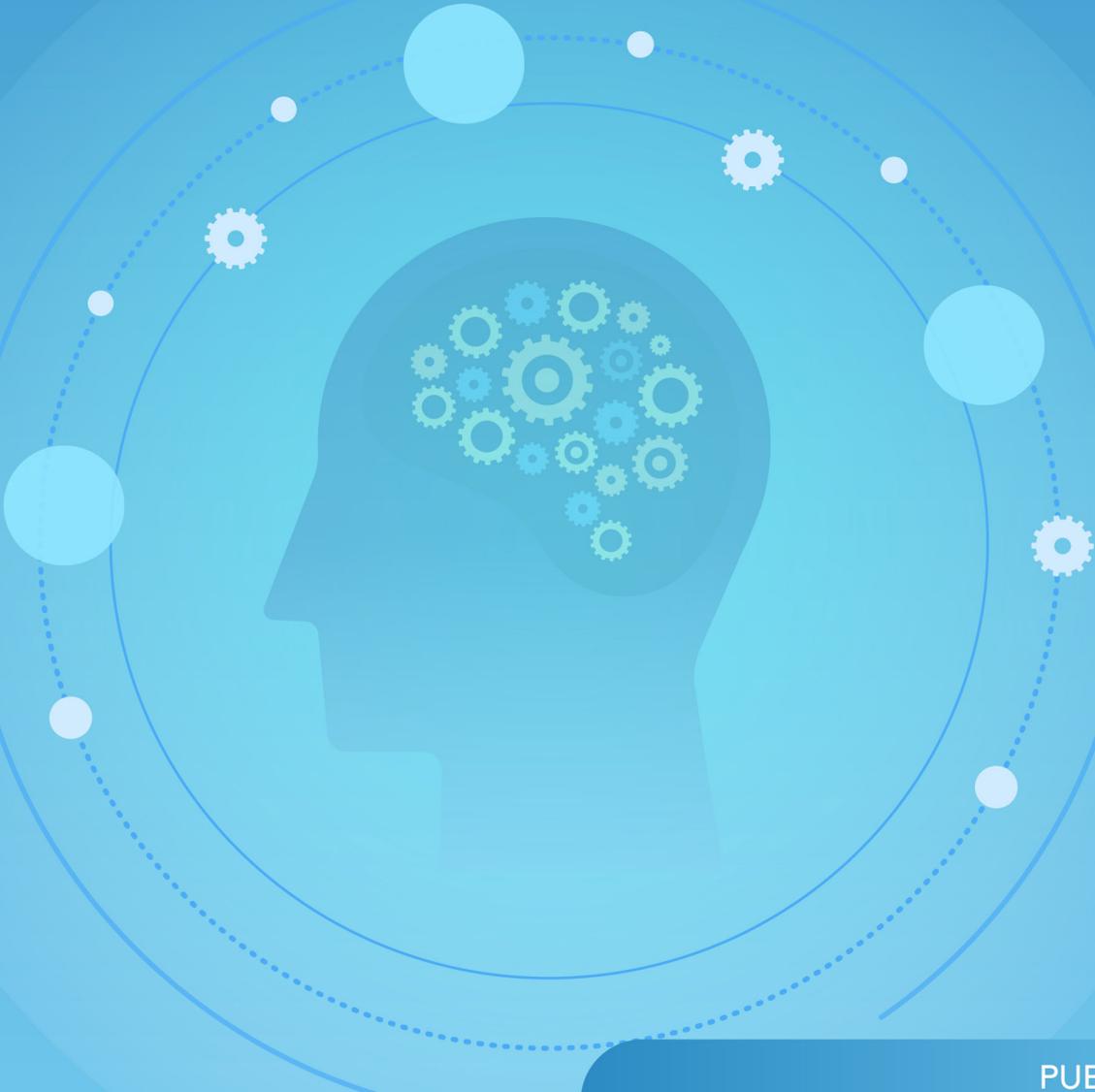




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An Examination of Curriculum Content and Instructional Techniques Used in Teaching Social Studies in Senior High Schools in Ghana

Anthony Owusu Akowuah^{1*}, George Asante¹, Georgina Asibey¹

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ABSTRACT

This study examined instructional practices that Senior High School (SHS) Social Studies teachers (SST) adopt in the Asokore Mampong Municipality, located in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The study employed a descriptive research design. Using the census technique, a sample size of 51 teachers was chosen from six SHS. A self-designed questionnaire guide was used to gather data. Descriptive statistics were utilised to analyse the data. The study showed that SSTs are moderately aware of the overall objectives of Social Studies. Also, teachers employed the lecture and discussion technique frequently during instruction. However, teachers minimally integrated both teacher-centered and student-centered teaching techniques. They, therefore lacked innovative teaching techniques in Social Studies. The study recommends that repeated conferences and training should be organised to update Social Studies Teachers' knowledge and skills of teaching.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers play a crucial role in the effectiveness of lessons and the quality of education around the world (Barberos *et al.*, 2021). Studies on academic and educational outcomes have emphasised the role of teachers in improving learning outcomes. This idea departs from normal educational tasks that suggest that efforts directed towards education generate relevant outcomes (Baafi, 2020). Despite the considerable work done in schools and the provision of educational resources, there are large differences when comparing schools and classrooms. According to Curtiss *et al.* (2016), school quality, teacher quality, and teaching quality currently dominate the educational discourse. Instructional practices refer to instructors' procedures and methods to help students acquire the necessary knowledge during instructional periods. These teaching practices characterise the pillar of teaching excellence and the teaching environment (Curtiss *et al.*, 2016). A study by Morrison *et al.* (2019) found that different teaching practices are used in different contexts for different intended outcomes.

In a learning atmosphere where the instructor is the ultimate expert and students are considered to be extremely ignorant of the content of the teaching, teacher-centred teaching strategies evoke pedagogical methods here (Baeten *et al.*, 2016). On the other hand, student-based learning is also undertaken when the students are well aware of the content. The student-based learning is, therefore, to promote critical thinking and other higher-level skills, and improve learning outcomes (Baafi, 2020). Therefore, interest in student-dominated strategies has received increasing attention worldwide. Student-centred teaching strategies have been found to produce better student outcomes than teacher-centred approaches (Day

et al., 2016; Kang & Keinonen, 2018; Li *et al.*, 2018).

In addition to the above teaching methods, an interesting category now is the integrated teaching approach which was developed from a combination of teacher-centred and student-centred approaches (Chick & Hassel, 2009). The technique combines different parts of learning that emphasise the fusion of ideas to create associations for students to do activities related to real-life events (Riordan *et al.*, 2019). The integrated approach to learning is an important ideal to produce a constructive and collaborative learning atmosphere (Day *et al.*, 2016).

Based on the disparities associated with teachers' teaching practices, the Senior High School Social Studies syllabus detailed teaching and learning activities that would help teachers attain Social Studies objectives. The activities are to guarantee the highest learner involvement during teaching sections including eschewing memorisation and exercise-driven strategies and instead emphasise instructions that involve all students; domains of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor in their (teachers) lesson delivery whenever applicable. This prominence will help learners advance critical thinking; apply techniques to solve problems, and obtain desirable values and attitudes (MOE, 2010).

Given the long history of social studies education in the world and Ghana and its academic and social importance, it is still questionable whether Social Studies has achieved or is achieving its goal of effective citizenship, while citizenship education is essential in primary and pre-primary curricula (Akhtar, 2008; Ayaaba *et al.*, 2014; Bekoe, 2006). The subject has a great impact on the state of mind of citizens. For developing the skills, ethics, experiences and intelligence needed to form responsible and patriotic citizens in a country (Akhtar, 2008; Lawal,

¹ Department of Business and Social Sciences Education, University of Cape Coast, Ghana

* Corresponding author's email: asantegeorge5@gmail.com

2002). To achieve this goal, it is necessary to understand and use certain educational practices in Social Studies. The lessons should be engaging and positively influence students' attitudes, morals and skills (Ayaaba *et al.*, 2014; Adeyemi, 2003).

However, it is alarming that some Senior High Schools in Ghana are facing a mismatch between Social Studies Teachers' (SST) knowledge of cross-curricula teaching techniques and subject-specific teaching techniques that enable students to imbibe attitudes, values and skills (Abdulai, 2020a; Bordoh *et al.*, 2021). They revealed that teachers' knowledge of teaching methods and their attitudes towards the subject can influence students' behaviour, ideals, and abilities. These identified gaps have compelled the study to examine SST's instructional practices leading to the achievement of the curriculum's overall goals, as in most cases, teachers employ instructional methods that facilitate their jobs concerning their insights, attitudes, personal inclinations, and institutional cultures. In addition, teachers adjust the nature and eminence of the instructional process based on student entry behaviour and level of engagement (Curtiss *et al.*, 2016). The study objectives were to find out what level of knowledge SSTs have on the overall objectives of the subject, and the views of the SST on the instructional techniques used in teaching Social Studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching

Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching supported this study by providing a structure for understanding teachers' responsibilities and practices (Danielson, 1996). The framework identifies 22 elements grouped into four domains: Planning and Organisation, Classroom Environment, Instruction, and Professional Responsibilities. These domains reflect teachers' duties before, during, and after classroom interactions, making it an ideal framework for examining SST instructional practices.

Domain 1 (1st Domain) which is for planning and organisation focuses on lesson design and content knowledge. Domain 2 (2nd Domain) – about classroom environment encompasses non-instructional interactions such as classroom management and relationships. The 3rd Domain which is about instruction involves the procedures during teaching and learning such as communication, questioning, and feedback. The 4th Domain is about professional responsibilities. Here. It highlights teachers' obligations outside the classroom or after teaching, including reflection, record-keeping, and professional development.

Danielson's Framework is beneficial for this study as it aligns with the research questions on teachers' instructional practices, assessment methods, and subject objectives. The framework provides a structure for teachers' deliberations, communicates teaching expectations, and aids in selecting essential skills for effective teaching.

By applying this framework, the study can examine SST practices, identify areas for improvement, and inform professional development initiatives to enhance teaching and learning outcomes (Danielson, 1996).

Social Studies Teachers' Knowledge on the Overall Objectives of the Social Studies

To ensure effective teaching of Social Studies at the Senior High School level in Ghana, it is essential to appreciate the essence, purpose and historical development of the subject. The subject has various definitions, grouped into three main categories: as a means of teaching social sciences, as a unification of social sciences and as civic education (Ananga & Ayaaba, 2004; Savage & Armstrong, 2000). The purpose of Social Studies is to educate students about the constantly changing social environment and the world at large and to provide them with the knowledge, skills and mindsets essential for everyday life. Ayaaba and Odumah (2013) noted that advocates of Social Studies as citizenship education have proposed these aims to guide instructional procedures for the programme:

i. Adjusting the learner to a varying setting. Studying Social Studies ought to enable learners to obtain relevant knowledge, positive attitudes, morals and abilities to adapt to their shifting society;

ii. Inculcating national mindfulness and unity. This goal aims to make learners aware that despite the diversifying nature of Ghanaian ethnic groups, all of us are one people with a shared destiny fitting the same nation;

iii. Inculcating constructive attitudes, morals and abilities. A goal of this nature would instil constructive attitudes in learners who will become good citizens to cooperatively ensure a forward-moving nation;

iv. Training good citizens keen and able to impact national advancement. This objective would instil in learners the need to avoid all manner of adverse work habits including laziness, and pilferage among others and rather work diligently and promote national advancement; and

v. Capability to solve problems through coherent decisions. This objective too would cause learners to be thoughtful citizens and individuals capable of applying the acquired knowledge via problem-solving and decision-making.

To achieve educational objectives, teachers must have the necessary knowledge and understanding of effective methods. The curriculum should have long-term and short-term objectives that guide the implementation of the course (Tyler, 1949). The 2010 Social Studies Curriculum for SHS outlines broad objectives aimed at shaping the attitudes of students to become virtuous citizens of Ghana. More precisely, there are six overall objectives which cover the areas indicated by Bloom's (1956) Classification of Educational Objectives. Thus, the curriculum is devised to support learners to have the ability to grow the capability to adjust to the evolving and constantly varying society of Ghana; develop helpful mindsets and morals concerning personal and social issues;

cultivate critical and analytical skills in assessing problems for objective decision-making; be equipped with national consciousness and unity; use inquiry and problem-solving skills to solve personal and social problems; and become a responsible citizen capable and willing to contribute to national advancement (MOE, 2010).

The SHS Social Studies curriculum outlines teaching and learning activities to achieve the subject objectives, emphasizing student engagement, critical thinking, problem-solving, and desired values and attitudes (MOE, 2010). The three dimensions of the curriculum profile – Knowledge and Understanding, Knowledge Use, Attitudes and Values – are linked to Bloom’s (1956) and Krathwohl’s (1956) taxonomy of educational objectives. The ultimate goal is to produce dignified Ghanaians who are thoughtful and well-informed citizens with good decision-making skills for personal and social well-being. The subject will precisely enable learners to discover and protect their environment, show the spirit of togetherness in the family and society, appreciate their exclusive identity, prove to be mature citizens, cultivate attitudes for well and undisturbed cohabitation, guarantee the maintainable utilisation of national assets, cultivate the spirit of loyalty and national dignity, and the development of global competitiveness (MOE, 2020).

In Ghana, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports (MESS) requires teachers to familiarise themselves with the general objectives before teaching (MESS, 2007). Teachers’ knowledge of Social Studies is essential as it affects the daily lives of students, enabling them to acquire the necessary experiences, attitudes, principles and skills (Tiberus & Tipping, as cited in Odekyi, 2020).

Social Studies Teachers’ Teaching Techniques

Effective Social Studies teaching practices are essential to achieving the goals of citizenship and subject productivity (Bolinger & Wilson, 2007). Knowledge acquisition involves the expansion, questioning, and application of information, rather than simple memorization (Resnick & Klopfer, as cited in Bolinger & Wilson, 2007). Therefore, teaching methods, techniques and strategies should focus on effective learning outcomes each tailored to the specific needs of students, the teacher’s understanding of the teaching approach, knowledge of the content, practice of a variety of approaches, and adequate knowledge in several disciplines. (Tamakloe, 1991; Banks, 1990; Byrne, 1983; Aggarwal, 1982; Mehlinger, 1981). A variety of techniques include the following:

Lecture Technique

The lecture method, as posited by Mensah (2020) is a teacher-centred approach and is an old technique in formal education. This method emphasises rote learning, where the teacher speaks and students act as knowledge carriers. It is a verbal presentation of learning material which is effective for teaching information, especially for covering a large amount of content in a short period of time. However, it is a one-way communication with the

instructor presenting the information to the students.

Team Teaching

The social sciences, by their interdisciplinary nature, lend themselves to collaborative teaching through team teaching (Adu-Yeboah, 2008). Team teaching involves multiple instructors teaching an interdisciplinary course, sharing responsibility for teaching, assessment, and achievement of learning objectives (Bess, 2000; Davis, 1997). Goetz (2000) also describes team teaching as the collaboration of two or more teachers to plan, direct, and evaluate learning activities for the same group of students. Therefore, Social Studies which is made up of many disciplines calls for varied techniques (George & Davis-Wiley, 2000). Maroney’s (1995) models for team teaching are:

I. Traditional Team Teaching: It involves teachers delivering content and skills to students. Typically, one teacher presents new material to the entire class while other teachers take notes or create a semantic map (Bess, 2000). In this approach, teachers share equal responsibility for engaging all students during learning.

II. The Harmonising and Solidarity Team Teaching: Here, one teacher takes charge of delivering the content to the student with the other teacher taking charge of offering follow-up activities on related topics,

III. Corresponding Teaching: This allows for two classifications of students and a teacher is liable for presenting equal stuff to their learners.

IV. Differentiated Split Class: This technique is a classification of learners into minor units based on their instructional needs.

V. Teacher Monitoring: This requires a teacher from a team to do the teaching while the other teacher moves around the classroom to supervise learners’ knowledge and attitude.

Role-Play Technique

Role-playing aims to clarify situations or solve problems through spontaneous dramatization (Clarke, 1973). It involves students taking on roles based on fictional events and acting realistically (Mehlinger, 1981). Role-playing allows students to experience emotional reactions in real-world conditions, making it an effective method of problem-solving (Jacob *et al.*, 2002; Martorella, 2001). This approach allows students to explore human problems through guided discussions, following an instinctive representation of the problem (Shaftel & Shaftel, 1982).

Enquiry Technique

The inquiry technique emphasises students’ familiarity with their environment since it involves the learner’s active participation in the educational process (Akintola, 2001). This promotes the acquisition of knowledge through exploration and experimentation and leads to better assimilation, ultimately, to the formation of informed and inquiring citizens (Kadeef, 2000).

Simulation Technique

Simulation is closely related to role-playing or imitation (ASESP, 1994). It allows students to acquire skills, knowledge or behaviour by engaging in realistic situations (Giley, 1991). Simulation combines role-playing and problem-solving, intending to simplify complex social realities (Clarke, 1973). It is sometimes called a simulation game because it allows students to adopt different perspectives and make decisions independently (Mensah, 2020; Martorella, 1994).

Discussion Technique

The discussion technique involves the teacher asking relevant questions to stimulate students' thinking and opinions on a topic, allowing them to build new knowledge on previous knowledge (Brookfield, 1991). This approach is inclusive and participatory, strongly engaging students and encouraging them to contribute to the educational effort (Arends, 1998). The discussion technique is important in the social sciences because it allows for the exploration of controversial issues, promotes democratic values, and encourages active engagement, tolerance, and appreciation of diverse perspectives (Amoah, 1998).

Project Technique

Project work is a deliberate and sincere act that provides students freedom and responsibility, practising collective and democratic behaviour (Kilpatrick, as cited in Adu-Yeboah, 2008). It allows students to achieve a specific goal through student-directed actions, the development of independence, and the application of theory to real-world activities. Projects help students develop analytical skills, formulate hypotheses, and create a coherent understanding of a situation (Adu-Yeboah, 2008).

Fieldwork

Fieldwork is an educational technique that takes place outside the classroom and involves planned and organised trips to the local community or neighbourhood of the school (Adu-Yeboah, 2008; Tamakloe, 1991). This approach allows teachers to use real-life situations to help students understand theories and students to obtain educational information through direct observation (Kilpatrick, 1965; Hayford, 1992). Fieldwork also promotes tolerance, cooperation, and cultural awareness, making it an effective technique in teaching Social Studies (Anderson & Piscitella, 2002; Sawyer, 2015).

Resource Person

This involves hiring specialists or experts to help teach students, utilising their exceptional skills and knowledge in specific areas (Mensah, 2020). Resource persons, such as health professionals, administrators, or politicians, are invited to teach topics the subject teacher cannot reliably cover (Mehlinger, 1981). This approach makes lessons more engaging, improves students' respect for community members, promotes effective citizenship, and allows students to emulate positive role models (Abdulai, 2020b).

Dramatisation

Dramatization as an effective technique for teaching Social Studies, improves students' reading comprehension and concept retention (Anderson, 2017; Rose *et al.*, 2000). It complements the Social Studies curriculum by accommodating multicultural educational practices, interdisciplinary learning, and social justice issues (Lement & Dunakin, 2005). Integrating drama into Social Studies instruction increases student engagement and improves assessment performance (Morris, 2001). Creative drama allows individuals to engage in group work and express themselves creatively (Ustündağ, 1996). It contributes significantly to the acquisition of human qualities such as creativity, imagination, and self-confidence. Drama is a powerful tool for promoting student progress, with substantial improvements in levels of academic effectiveness in Social Sciences (Yılmaz, 2013).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study used a descriptive research design due to its versatility and practicality in identifying current conditions and indicating current needs (Osuala, 2001). Respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality to mitigate potential weaknesses and were given sufficient time to complete the questionnaire (Cohen *et al.*, 2003). The study's population comprised 51 SSTs in SHS in the Asokore Mampong Municipality, Ashanti Region, Ghana. These schools were Kumasi Academy, Tawheed Senior High, Parkoso Community Day Senior High, Sakafia Islamic, Ibadur Rahman and Nuru Ameen Islamic Senior High Schools. The schools were all in the same study area and possessed similar attributes. The census technique was adopted for this study, taking into consideration the overall purpose, research questions posed, and research design chosen. According to Cohen *et al.* (2011), a population that falls under the 100, census is ideal for the study.

A 17 questionnaire item was used to gather data on teachers' knowledge of the objectives and techniques of teaching Social Studies. The researchers formulated the questionnaire items themselves. Two experts in the field of Social Studies education crosschecked the questionnaire items to ensure validity. The data obtained from the participants were analysed quantitatively using descriptive statistics, which allowed the researchers to answer each research question. A Cronbach Alpha value of 0.87 was achieved for the questionnaire items. Reliability was thus achieved based on the recommendation of Fraenkel and Wallen (2000) that if the co-efficient alpha value is .70 the instrument is reliable and of good adequacy for collecting relevant data for the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: What level of knowledge do the SST have on the overall objectives of the subject?

Odekyi (2020) opines that teachers cannot teach a subject well without knowing its goals and objectives, which leads to poor curricular orientation. Research Question 1 explored SSTs' understanding of the objectives of the

subject. Their responses to these objectives are presented in Table 1. Table 1 indicates that teachers agree with the objectives in Table 1.

Table 1: SST Knowledge of the Overall Social Studies Objectives (N = 51)

Statement	Mean	Std. D
Social Studies focuses on ensuring the education of citizens.	4.02	.93
It helps students to be aware of their physical, social and cultural environment.	3.57	.92
Social Studies groom individuals to suit society.	3.55	.97
Social Studies is capable of addressing issues of human concern.	3.53	.97
Social Studies helps students to obtain relevant knowledge, and the right attitudes, values and skills.	3.47	.14
It creates a sensitisation of individual rights and responsibilities.	3.39	1.02
Social Studies gives individual learners a broad knowledge of the full curriculum.	3.28	2.96
Mean of Means; SD of SDs	3.54	1.13

Source: Field Survey (2025)

of Social Studies, with a maximum mean of 4.02 and a standard deviation of 0.93. The overall mean and standard deviation were 3.54 and 1.13 respectively. This indicated that Social Studies teachers are moderately aware of the objectives of the subject. This is consistent with the professional practice framework proposed by Danielson, emphasising the importance of clear objectives adapted to different learners. The results are also consistent with the studies of Ayaaba *et al.* (2014), and Odekyi (2020) emphasising the importance of Social Studies in educating students in patriotism, values and skills essential for the development of society.

Research Question 2: What are the views of SST on teaching techniques usage in Social Studies teaching?

The Social Studies syllabus recommends that SHS SST emphasizes teaching and learning activities that help attain Social Studies objectives (MOE, 2010). These activities aim to promote learner involvement, analytical thinking, problem-solving techniques, and desirable attitudes and values. Table 2 presents teachers' views on the teaching techniques they use in Social Studies teaching.

Table 2: Views of SST on the Instructional Techniques Usage in Social Studies Teaching (N = 51)

Techniques	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often		Very often	
	f	%	f	%	F	%	f	%	F	%
Enquiry/Discovery	20	39	19	37	7	14	5	10	-	-
Team Teaching	23	45	18	35	6	12	4	8	-	-
Discussion	-	-	-	-	11	22	21	41	19	37
Role Play	19	37	18	35	9	18	5	10	-	-
Debate	21	41	16	31	8	16	6	12	-	-
Fieldwork/Project	22	43	19	37	5	10	5	10	-	-
Lecture	-	-	-	-	11	22	18	35	22	43
Resource Person	19	37	19	37	6	12	7	14	-	-
Simulation	19	37	18	35	8	16	6	12	-	-
Dramatisation	19	37	20	39	6	12	6	12	-	-

Source: Field Survey, (2025)

Table 2 shows teachers frequently use discussion and lecture techniques in Social Studies classes. The majority of teachers 22 (43%) prefer the lecture technique, while 19(39%) prefer discussions. This suggests that traditional teaching methods are still prevalent. Research supports the use of discussion technique because it promotes student participation and knowledge acquisition (Balogun *et al.*, 1981). Again, the study found that teachers rarely used interactive techniques such as role-playing, debate,

and dramatisation. The results do not correspond to Danielson's (1996) professional practice framework, which emphasises clear communication, questioning techniques, and sustained learning activities. The predominance of discussion and lecture, rather than student-centred approaches, highlights the need for professional development to improve SSTs' teaching practices.

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions below have been outlined following the findings generated from the study. SSTs are moderately conversant with the general objectives of the subject. Again, SHS SST lesson delivery usually centres on students passing a final examination or WASSCE. As a result, the teachers choose and apply teaching techniques such as whole-class discussion, lectures, questions and answers to assist them complete the teaching units in the Social Studies syllabus, which, remains the hallmark of a competent teacher in the country. Therefore, SSTs are discriminatory in applying teaching methods that centre on students in their classrooms.

Usually, they choose methods and techniques that facilitate their jobs concerning their insights and attitudes, personal inclinations and institutional cultures, thus undermining students' complete understanding. It also seems inadequate for helping students develop critical thinking skills, requisite knowledge, desirable attitudes and values which are necessary tools for nation-building. Educational service providers should, therefore, organise a comprehensive Social Studies pedagogy to improve teachers' competence in the required teaching practices. This would help teachers to stay current with subject concepts, techniques, and methods and to cultivate a constructive approach to teaching the subject. Also, heads of SHS and heads of Social Studies departments must insist on the regular application of Social Studies objectives in daily lesson plans. Their before, during and after forms of assessments should stem from the general objectives of Social Studies as well, as suggested by Danielson's (1996) theory.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study should be replicated across Ghana by interested organizations, institutions or individuals. It is anticipated that this would lead to an increase in the sample size and a deeper examination of issues related to Social Studies education in the country. Also, future research should address students' assessments of the effectiveness of SST. This will be helpful to know the competency level of SST. Further research could also cover SST instructional practices at Junior High Schools since the current study was limited to the SHS.

Implications of the Study

This study implies that a better understanding of Social Studies curriculum objectives, teaching practices and authentic assessment techniques in SHS will help teachers teach effectively, in line with the subject objectives. Also, regular in-service training courses to improve teachers' understanding of teaching techniques, with an emphasis on learner-centred techniques will help students to ask higher-level thinking questions such as students' problem-solving skills and attitudinal changes.

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