

TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDING AND USE OF THEMATIC APPROACH IN TEACHING AND LEARNING OF SOCIAL STUDIES IN RIVERS STATE

Okoro, C.O. (Ph.D) and Okoro, C.U.

University of Port Harcourt

ABSTRACT: *The purpose of the study was to determine teachers' understanding and practice towards thematic approach in teaching and learning of social studies in Rivers State. The study was guided by three research questions. The study adopted a descriptive survey method. The population consisted of all the teachers in Obia-Akpor Local Government Area. A sample size of 56 respondents was used for the study. The instrument used for gathering data from respondents was self-constructed questionnaire titled "Teachers' Understanding and Practice of Thematic Instructional Questionnaire (TUPTIQ)". The data gathered were analysed with the mean and standard deviation. The following emerged as the major findings of the study: that teachers' understanding of thematic approach in teaching social studies is not sufficient; teachers do not have adequate thematic practice approach in teaching social studies; and that teachers' years of experience is not a determinant factor for teachers' utilization of thematic instruction in teaching social studies. Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations were made: Special attention should be given to teachers' education by all stakeholders; Government should employ competent staff as well as funded programmes to enable the teachers select and use learning activities/approaches that will provide opportunities for the learner to concretize learnt concept. Regular symposium should also be organized for teachers to update themselves of the current trends in education.*

KEYWORDS: Thematic Instruction, integration, Interdisciplinary Social Studies

INTRODUCTION

Social studies teachers' instructional competences are instrumental to the effective implementation of social studies curriculum in junior secondary schools in Nigeria. Thus, the quality of effective teaching and learning of social studies depends on the teachers ability and capability to use effective instructional approaches. Considering its importance, social studies is not concerned only with the study of man and society, rather, it is concerned with the study of man within the context of political, economic, cultural, and technological environment. No wonder Okobia (1985) cited in Okoro (2005) opined that social studies is an interdisciplinary approach to the study of human beings in group interaction. Thus social studies aims at providing citizens with skills, competence, moral values and reasoned judgments to effectively, live interact and contribute positively to the economic, social, political and cultural development of the society.

Despite the varying conceptions of social studies, there is general consensus among social studies experts in Nigeria that the body of knowledge which comprises social science, humanities and the physical sciences provides the core content and materials for social studies curriculum. Hence the activity-oriented, creative and reflective thinking inculcated in social studies are drawn from social sciences.

The problem in Nigeria is not planning educational programmes or reforming the existing ones but effective implementation to achieve desired outcome. This cannot be achieved without effective teaching of social studies by competent teachers who understand the interdisciplinary and thematic arrangement of the subject and more over the pedagogies to inculcate desirable learning outcomes. This implies that the conventional methods of teaching cannot bring the needed change in the learner. Okam (2014) of the opinion that since social studies represents one of the curriculum arrangements which capitalizes largely on the use of methods to sustain the reason for its existence as an important subject in the school system. Knowledge of a variety of instructional strategies and the flexibility to change them both within and among lessons are the greatest assets a teacher can have. Mezieobi (2013) posits that an effective and committed teacher prepares thoroughly in advance for teaching and learning interaction. The proactive teaching preparation involves selection of what to teach, the expected learner behaviour (instructional objective), determining the learning activities and discovery oriented methods among other things. The poor quality of social studies teachers in the implementation process manifest in the teachers' reliance on expository instructional methods other than such methods as reflective methods, contemplative and creative methods for effective implementation.

The National Policy on Education (2013) shows the thematic arrangement of Basic Education Curriculum, for example, subject such as religion and national values has under it Christian Religious knowledge, Islamic Studies, Social Studies, Civic Education and Security Education. The question now is are teachers competent or understand this type of approach/arrangement in order to equip the learners with functional skills and competences necessary for self reliance. Preparing students for basic education especially instilling in them social, moral norms and values which are the major goals of religion and national values requires team teaching, where teachers are expected to cooperatively plan the content, organize learning objectives, both process, skills and content knowledge around the theme. This will not only provide opportunities for the child to develop life manipulative skills but develop a total child.

Thematic Instructional Approach

Thematic approach is the way of teaching and learning where many areas of the curriculum are connected together and integrated within a theme thematic approach to instruction is a powerful tool for integrating the curriculum and eliminating isolated and reductionist nature of teaching it allows learning to be more natural than the fragmented nature of the school activities. Here the students are actively involved and they learn more skills through thematic learning cognitive skills such as reading, thinking, memorizing and writing are put in the context of a real life situation under the broad aim to allow for creative exploration.

Thematic instruction is based on the idea that people acquire knowledge, best when learned in the context of a coherent whole and when they can connect what they are learning to the real world. Esu (2012) highlighted steps in selecting a theme as follows.

- 1) Choosing a theme (teachers strive to connect the theme to the student's everyday life).
- 2) Designing the integrated curriculum. teachers must organize learning objectives of the curriculum both process skills and content knowledge around the theme. In the study of weather/climate of a place for instance mathematics, social studies, science etc are involved.

- 3) Designing the instruction: This usually involves making changes to the class schedule combining hours normally devoted to specific topics organizing fieldtrips, teaching in teams, bringing outside experts etc.
- 4) Encouraging presentation and celebration: Because thematic instruction is often project oriented. It frequently involves students going collective presentation to the rest of the school or community.

METHODOLOGY

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to determine teachers understanding of thematic and practice towards thematic approach in teaching and learning social studies, specifically the objectives are;

1. to determine the extent of teachers' understanding of thematic approach in teaching of social studies.
2. to determine the extent of teachers' use of thematic approach in teaching and learning of social studies.
3. to find out if teachers' years of experience affect their practices on the thematic approach

Research Questions

1. To what extent do teachers understand thematic approach to instruction?
2. Do teachers use thematic approach in teaching social studies?
3. Do teachers' years of experience affect their practice on thematic approach.

Design of the Study

The design of the study is descriptive survey, which was adopted to collect data from a large sample of teachers in Obia-Akpor Local Government Area. The population of the study consists of all social studies teachers in Obia-Akpor Local government Area. a simple random sampling technique was used to select eight secondary schools from public schools and twenty from private schools all in Obia-Akpor. A total of twenty-eight schools and fifty-six social studies teachers make up the sample.

Instrumentation

The instrument for the data collection was questionnaire tagged: Teachers' Understanding and Practice of Thematic Instructional Questionnaire (TUPTIQ) consisted of two sections – A and B. Section A is made up of Bio-data of the respondents while section B contains the questionnaire items on the research questions. Each questionnaire item was assigned a four-point likert scale of Very Great Extent, Great Extent, Low Extent and Very Low Extent; while measure of teachers' practice was rated thus: Very Often, Often, Seldom and Never with a corresponding value of 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively. Weighted mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. A mean of 2.50 was derived from the value of the scale and used as a cut-off point. Any item in the questionnaire with a weighted mean of 2.50 and above is regarded as Agree while any item with a weighted mean less than 2.50 was regarded as Disagree.

RESULTS

The results obtained are presented in the tables relevant to the stated research questions answered.

Research Question 1

To what extent do teachers understand thematic approach to teaching?

Table 1: Means and standard deviation of questionnaire items on the extent to which teachers' understand thematic approach to teaching (N = 56)

S/N	ITEM	\bar{X}	SD	REMARK
1	Teachers involves the students in planning for the lesson	1.5	0.60	Disagree
2	Teaching using thematic approach need creativity	1.6	0.82	Disagree
3	Thematic approach is integrated in nature	2.6	1.61	Agree
4	Theme are drawn from different areas of curriculum	1.4	0.68	Disagree
5	Students are actively involved in thematic instruction	2.3	1.05	Disagree
6	Students are actively involved in thematic instruction	1.5	0.61	Disagree
7	Thematic approach can be liken to be interdisciplinary instruction	2.5	1.59	Agree
8	In planning thematic teaching, a lot of ideas critical thinking and creativity are required	1.9	1.41	Disagree
9	Thematic instruction allows learning to be more natural than the fragmented school activities	1.9	1.43	Disagree
	Average Total Score	1.9	1.09	

In table 1, items 3 and 7 had mean scores above cut-off mark, indicating that thematic approach is integrated in nature and liken to be interdisciplinary instruction. While the remaining items mean scores were below the cut-off mark. This shows that the teachers' understanding of thematic approach in teaching social studies is not sufficient.

Research Question 2

Do teachers practice thematic approach in teaching social studies?

Table 2: Means and standard deviation of questionnaire items on teachers thematic practice approach in teaching social studies (N = 56)

S/N	ITEM	\bar{X}	SD	REMARK
1	Orients students to the lesson in line with content and skills to be mastered	1.9	1.40	Disagree
2	Uses creative methods to teach	1.5	0.61	Disagree
3	Encourages out-of-class learning activities	2.1	1.42	Disagree
4	Combine value, skills and knowledge between subjects while teaching	2.7	1.28	Agree
5	Involve other teachers in planning theme project	3.3	1.11	Agree
6	Students are given opportunities to experience different situations	2.9	1.67	Agree

7	Allows students to originate new ideas	2.6	1.62	Agree
8	Concludes lesson presented	1.8	1.47	Disagree
	Average Total Score	2.35	1.32	

From the above table, the average score on teachers thematic practice approach in teaching social studies indicates that the cut-off mean is higher than the average mean score of 2.35. This indicates that teachers do not have adequate thematic practice approach in teaching social studies.

Research Question 3

Do teachers' years of experience affect the use of thematic instruction in teaching social studies?

Table 3: Means and standard deviation of questionnaire items on the effects of teachers years of experience on the use of thematic instruction in teaching social studies (N = 56)

S/N	YEARS OF EXPERIENCE	\bar{X}	SD	REMARK
1	1 – 5 yrs	1.4	0.68	Disagree
2	6 – 10yrs	2.5	2.64	Agree
3	10 – 15yrs	2.5	2.73	Agree
4	16 – 20yrs	1.5	0.60	Disagree
5	21 – 25yrs	1.5	0.63	Disagree
6	26 – 20yrs	1.9	1.46	Disagree
7	31yrs and above	2.7	1.28	Agree
	Average Total Score	2.0	1.43	

From the table presented above, items 2, 3 and 7 had mean scores above cut-off, while items 1, 4, 5 and 6 had mean scores below the cut-off mark. The average score on teachers' years of experience on the use of thematic instruction in teaching social studies indicates that the cut-off mark is higher than the average mean score of 2.0. This show that teacher's years of experience is not a determinant factor for teachers' utilization of thematic instruction in teaching social studies.

DISCUSSION

This study answered three research questions. Information in Table 1 showed that teachers' understanding of thematic approach in teaching social studies is not sufficient. This finding corroborates with Mezieobi (2013) who found that the poor quality of social studies teachers in the implementation process manifest in the teachers' reliance on expository instructional methods other than such methods as reflective methods, contemplative and creative methods for effective implementation. The results of the analysis in Table 2, indicates that teachers do not have adequate thematic practice approach in teaching social studies, which is against the recommendations of National Policy on Education (2013) and Esu (2012). The results of the third research question in

Table 3 showed that teachers' years of experience is not a determinant factor for teachers' utilization of thematic instruction in teaching social studies. This means that teachers' non-use of thematic instructional approach is not based on teachers' years of experience, but due to teachers' ignorance and poor methodological approaches to teaching. This finding agrees with Mezieobi (2013) who observed that poor quality of social studies teachers in the implementation process manifest in the teachers' reliance on expository instructional methods other than such methods as reflective methods, contemplative and creative methods for effective implementation. Okam (2013) also found that Knowledge of a variety of instructional strategies and the flexibility to change them both within and among lessons is the greatest asserts a teacher can have.

CONCLUSION

The finding of the study showed that teachers' understanding of thematic approach in teaching social studies is not sufficient. The study also found that teachers do not have adequate thematic practice approach in teaching social studies and that teachers' years of experience is not a requisite for use and non-use of thematic instructional approach in social studies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Sequel to the findings and the conclusion of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Special attention should be given to teachers' education by all stakeholders.
2. Government should employ competent staff as well as funded programmes to enable the teachers select and use learning activities/approaches that will provide opportunities for the learner to concretize learnt concept.
3. Regular symposium should be organized for teachers to update themselves of the current trends in education.

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