

# Academic Ability and Students' Knowledge of Social Issues and Concepts: A Review in Social Studies

DARAMOLA, Clement Oladayo (Ph.D)

*Department of Social Studies, College of Education, Ikere Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria*

**Abstract:** This paper reviewed the relationship between students' academic ability and their knowledge of social issues and concepts with a peep on Social Studies curriculum in secondary schools. Buttressing the aim of Social Studies in promotion of knowledge, intellectual processes, and democratic dispositions required of students to be active and become effective citizens that is useful to themselves, people in their environment, the Nation and the world at large, the study explored social concepts and various social issues with a view of eradicating the social problems through adequate knowledge of Social Studies skills and improve students' academic ability. In order to proffer solutions to the identified social problems that arose due to poor students' knowledge of social issues and concepts, Social Studies teachers, curriculum planners and government remain to be powerful instruments to resolve these evil effects of poor knowledge of social issues and concepts through full implementation of Social Studies curriculum at both junior and senior secondary classes.

**Keywords:** Academic Ability, Students' Knowledge of Social Issues and Concepts and Social Studies

## I. INTRODUCTION

The present decay in academic ability of students most especially among secondary school students and moral values in Nigeria emerged like a thunderbolt at the instance of the poor knowledge of the youths on Social Studies concepts and skills that has resulted into various social issues with its major adverse effects on the young generation academic ability and future ambitions (Adebisi, 2013). He stated further that higher percentage of secondary schools and university students are engaging in various immoral activities such as examination malpractices, cultism, violence, cybercrimes, sexual immoralities, etc, and if something is not done to curb these vices, it may adversely degenerate the progress of this our country-Nigeria.

This admission was just an official declaration of the social issues which the Nigerian masses have been battling with for quite some time. The attendant effects of these social issues were felt virtually in every part of the country. This became visible as many youths engaged in unpatriotic activities that disrupt their academic pursuit and endangered other citizens of the country due to poor knowledge of Social Studies concepts and skills.

The primary purpose of Social Studies is to develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world (National Council of the Social Studies,

1994). The great architects of American public education, such as Thomas Jefferson, Horace Mann, and John Dewey, believed that every student must be well versed in his nation's history, the principles and practices which undergird citizenship, and the institutions that define our government. In essence, Jefferson, Mann, and Dewey viewed the study of Social Studies as critical to the mission of public schools. Indeed, they would applaud the inclusion of a "responsible and involved citizen" in the Guiding Principles, as well as Social Studies as one of eight content areas in the Learning Results.

Abubakar (2013) stated that Social Studies instruction plays an extremely essential part in creating basic and normal reasoning capacity for commonsense social life, advancing political proficiency and fortifying law based esteems and ideas for the Advancement of utilitarian citizenship. He further stated that Social Studies contents could permit citizens to develop positive attitudes that could make them contribute their finest towards the welfare of the society which they are supposed to be. According to NCSS (2001), the "core mission of Social Studies education is to help students develop the knowledge, skills, and values that will enable them to become effective citizens" (NCSS task force on revitalizing citizenship education, 2001). Also, Barth (1993) defined social studies as the interdisciplinary integration of social science and humanities concepts for the purpose of practicing problem solving and decision making for developing citizenship skills on critical social issues. This definition is considered useful by the researcher because it emphasizes the ultimate goal of Social Studies teaching, to help students think critically and to use what they know to be active citizens. This will go a long way to improve their self-confidence and their academic ability. This academic ability most especially in Social Studies depends on students' knowledge of social issues and concepts. Therefore, the quest to overcome the challenges of poor knowledge of the Students on Social Studies concepts and social issues form the main thrust of this paper.

## II. ACADEMIC ABILITY: THE CONCEPT

Academic ability is commonly measured through examinations or continuous assessments but there is no general agreement on how it is best evaluated or which aspects are most important procedural knowledge such as skills or declarative knowledge such as facts. Furthermore, there are inconclusive results over which individual factors

successfully predict academic performance, elements such as test anxiety, environment, motivation, and emotions are considered as crucial to academic ability (Kool, et al. 2018).

Individual differences in academic performance have been linked to differences in intelligence and personality. Von Stumm, Hell, Chamorro-Premuzic (2011) Students with higher mental ability as demonstrated by IQ tests and those who are higher in conscientiousness (linked to effort and achievement motivation) tend to achieve highly in academic settings.

Academic ability can be influenced by parents' socio-economic status. Highly educated parents tend to have more stimulating learning environments. Magnuson (2007) Further, recent research indicates that the relationship quality with parents will influence the development of academic self-efficacy among adolescent-aged children, which will in turn affect their academic performance. Non-cognitive factors or skills, are a set of "attitudes, behaviors, and strategies" that promotes academic and professional success, Gutman and Schoon (2013) such as academic self-efficacy, self-control, motivation, expectancy and goal setting theories, emotional intelligence, and determination.

### III. CONCEPTS OF SOCIAL STUDIES

Like all other social sciences, the concepts of Social Studies as a subject of study that has been variously defined by different scholars and educational bodies. Odey (2019) maintained that Social Studies is a subject that equips students with skills and knowledge and the development of positive attitudes towards Nigerian cultural heritage. Kazi (2017) refers to Social Studies as representing and portraying of oneness and indivisibility of knowledge and the reality of man's interaction with the environment. Social Studies primarily is an integrated subject area designed to help students acquire the necessary skills, norms, knowledge and ideals of the society to enable them function adequately in the society. Furthermore, Coe (2014) views Social Studies as a discipline that helps students become responsible citizens in a culturally diverse, democratic society within an interdependent world. This is why students in a Social Studies classroom had to perform well in order to show that appropriate skills have been acquired. The United States of America commission on the rehabilitation of secondary education defined Social Studies as "Subject matter that is related to the organization and development of the human society and man as a member of social groups"(Nwanna, Nzewunwa, Girigiri & Okoh, (2007).

According to the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS, 2001), Social Studies is the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world. Kissock in Mbaba (2007) defined Social Studies as "a programme of

study which a society uses to instill in students or learners the knowledge, skills, attitudes and action it consider important concerning the relationship human being have with each other, their world and themselves". Therefore the above definition suggested that Social Studies is a vehicle through which desired culture, values and norms of the society, could be transformed. Tikumah (2009) conceives Social Studies as the types of leaning that aims at creating a free society of responsible and responsive citizen by imbibing them with desirable attitudes and values as appropriate mental and physical skills and abilities for meaningful living and interaction. Social Studies is the frontline in the development of positive attitudes and values (Darling-Hammond, Linda (2010). These attitudes are difficult to assess but are essential to the development of the student. Thus the Social Studies classroom and the learning experiences provided therein must create the atmosphere in which these can flourish. Through the learning of Social Studies, students will come to believe and act upon the core values (such as) human dignity, honesty, equality, co-operation, self-worth, national pride and self-discipline, and as such develop into responsible citizens.

Social Studies programmes provide experiences, through which students are expected to gain knowledge and insights, develop and practise a variety of skills and attitudes as well as human understanding and social responsibility. Social Studies lessons help students to explain human experiences in the past and present and develop in them the ability to anticipate and prepare for the experiences of the future, to make sense out of the world as they find it and build better worlds than they do find. Above all Social Studies (lessons should) help students to feel valued and valuable (Giles, 2013).

Parker (2010) submitted that Social Studies education has two goals: social understanding (i.e., knowledge of human societies) and civic competence (i.e., democratic citizenship). He explained further that the major objectives of Social Studies are to help children learn about the social world in which they live and how the world got that way. It should teach them to learn to cope with social realities, and to develop the knowledge attitudes and skills needed to adjust to the ever changing society and being a world citizen. Schools typically approach these two broad goals by way of three sub-goals: knowledge, attitudes and values, and skills. Teaching Social Studies through these goals would enable the students to acquire the require knowledge to develop their self-worth and academic ability.

### IV. STUDENTS' KNOWLEDGE OF SOCIAL ISSUES AND CONCEPTS IN SOCIAL STUDIES

Much Social Studies instruction at the secondary level emphasizes the coverage and memorization of fragmented information; critics of this learning method have called for more in-depth instruction (González, 2013). Non-implementation of Social Studies curriculum at the Senior Secondary classes have constituted a barrier to an effective teaching of Social Studies and students' adequate knowledge

of social issues and concepts. Social Studies as one of the core subjects in Nigeria education system appears to be relevant from primary school to tertiary institution level but failed to be implemented at senior secondary school level. Thus, many junior secondary school often forgot the Social Studies concepts and issues learnt at the junior classes. Sebiomo (2012) emphasised the need to implement Social Studies curriculum at senior secondary school level of education in order to compliment what students have learnt in junior classes and also to enhance effective teaching learning processes. In addition, the non-implementation of the curriculum at the senior secondary classes seems to have slowdown the achievement of the goal of inculcating moral value to the students throughout their secondary school education. This is due to the fact that the social values inculcated into their mind in their junior secondary school level might have been forgotten as they graduated to the senior secondary school classes. However, poor knowledge of social concepts and issues may degenerate into a large of social problems encountered in our society today.

#### V. SOCIAL ISSUES IN SOCIAL STUDIES

social problem is any condition or behavior that has negative consequences for large numbers of people and that is generally recognized as a condition or behavior that needs to be addressed (Leiserowitz, et. al., 2011). A social issue is a problem that influences many citizens within a society. It is a common problem in present-day society and one that many people strive to solve social issue or problem is an issue that has been recognized by society as a problem that is preventing society from functioning at an optimal level. According to Rubington & Weinberg (2010), it is important to understand that not all things that occur in society are raised to the level of social problems. Four factors have been outlined that seem to characterize a social issue or problem. These include:

1. The public must recognize the situation as a problem.
2. The situation is against the general values accepted by the society.
3. A large segment of the population recognizes the problem as a valid concern.
4. The problem can be rectified or alleviated through the joint action of citizens and/or community resources.

Discussing social issues can be contentious, but it is also an important part of making progress on these problems facing society. Community and classroom activities in Social Studies involving social issues can help raise awareness. Writing about social issues can also help expand people's understanding of these important challenges (Robinson, 2011). Example of social issues includes drug abuse, cultism, corruption, examination malpractice, poverty, thuggery, sexual harassment, religious conflicts, Racism, Wars, unemployment, Human trafficking, Marital rape and others. Among these identified problems, corruption, drug abuse, cultism and poverty would be given attention in this study in relation to students' academic ability.

#### *Corruption*

One of the greatest threats to Education, social, economic, and political development of any nation is corruption. Therefore, the challenges of corruption remain a major devastating issue facing Nigeria since the colonial period, although, this phenomena has become a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabrics of our system. The United Nations Global Programme against Corruption (GPAC) defines it as "abuse of power for private gain". The Transparency International has chosen a clear and focused definition of the term as "the abuse of entrusted power for private gain". It can also be defined as a pervasion or change from the general accepted rules or laws for selfish gain (Farida, 2010).

Nigeria is known as a country with a high level of corruption in all sectors of the country most especially secondary schools where students are meant to be prepared for higher education. Students are expected to be evaluated based on the curriculum and set objectives of the national educational body. However, corrupt practices frustrate this more since students are exploited in so many ways such as giving bribe to gain some educational opportunities, students going into sexual favour in order to gain good grades, student buying examination question papers before the exams and even the case of students writing for each other exchanging answer scripts (Aluko, 2008).

Corruption is one of the major causes of examinational malpractices in both public and private schools today. It occurs at all levels of both public and private schools in Nigeria both directly or indirectly. All over Nigeria, the perception of corruption in all schools is very high and uncontrollable. This is because, corruption undermines every aspect of the Educational System among which are, political development, economic development, social development and so on (Samson, 2012). It is on this note that Samson (2012) postulated that the issue of corruption leads to an extent whereby the common man will look at the trend and say, if the rich could do this to succeed or pass an exam, then my own child must survive too. So they will also emulate even if they don't have the money. The total effect is what we are experiencing today in decline in the academic ability of students. Kayode (2013) also reported that corruption in education has inspired some parents also intend to send their children to schools primarily to enable their children obtain excellent results and on the other hand support examination malpractices which have in turn degraded the quality and standard of education and also undermine the academic ability of students.

#### *Drug Abuse*

Drug abuse is a global problem that poses a great danger to the lives of individuals, society and political stability and security in many countries (United Nations, 2013). Drug is a substance that due to its chemical nature affects physical, mental and emotional functioning. Lewinsohn (2007) defines a drug as any product other than food or water that affects the

way people feel, think, see, and behave. According to the United Nations (2005), the use of illicit drugs has increased throughout the world and the major world trend is the increasing availability of many kinds of drugs among ever widening spectrum of consumers.

The world Health Organization (WHO) (2006) defined drug abuse as a state of periodic or chronic intoxication, detrimental to the individual and the Society, produced by the repeated consumption of a drug (natural or synthetic). Drug abuse is the use of drugs for purposes other than medical reasons, thus affecting the individual in a negative way socially, cognitively or physically. It can enter the body through chewing, inhaling, smoking, drinking, rubbing on the skin or injection. Drug abuse amongst the global youth population has become a serious problem affecting everyone. Addiction leads many people, young people prominent amongst them, into downward spiral of hopelessness that in some cases ends fatal (Nwaiwu, 2012).

Young people who persistently abuse substances often experience an array of problems, including academic difficulties, health-related problems, poor peer relationships and involvement with the juvenile justice system. Additionally, declining grades, absenteeism from school and other activities, and increased potential for dropping out of school are problems associated with adolescent substance abuse (Khattak, Iqbaland Ullah, 2012). Drugs affect the Students concentration span, which is drastically reduced and boredom sets in much faster than for non-drug and substance abusers. The Student will lose interest in school work including extra curriculum activities. Most of the psychoactive drugs affect the decision making process of the Students, creative thinking and the development of the necessary life and social skills are stunted. They also interfere with the awareness of an individual's unique potential and interest thus affecting their career development (Kikuvi, 2009).

Cognitive and behavioural problems experienced by alcohol- and Drug-using youth may interfere with their academic performance and also present obstacles to learning for their classmate (United Nations, 2005). Drug abuse is associated with crime maintenance of an orderly and safe school atmosphere conducive to learning. It leads to destruction of school property and classroom disorder. Drug abuse has adverse effects on the brain, kidney, liver, pancreases, heart and lung, thereby making them vulnerable to disease (Njore, 2015).

Drug abuse brings about lack of motivation to the Student. This is because, the ideas of reading and studying is no more in them. What rings in their memory is all about how to get high up with drug. It is also brings about decreased focus and increases forgetfulness. Research have proven that when a student is been indulge in drug abuse, the part of the brain that help in retaining what is learnt start to get weak thereby decreasing the spirit of focus in the Student and making the

person to forget easily (NACADA, 2012). Oshodi, Aina & Onajole (2010) also asserted that drug abuse causes brain fatigued syndrome which presents poor study assimilation and other mental problems, adversely affect students' performance in examination.

#### *Cultism*

Cultism is a system or practice of a cult. Cult on the other hand is a group of people with a religious philosophical or cultural identity sometimes viewed as a sect, often existing on the margins of society or exploitative towards its members. Cultism Popularly called in the neighbourhood as Secret Cult can be said to be an organisation of which people come together to pledge their allegiances under an oath and have a social bond of commitment and dedication for the good of the organisation. This set of people carry out their meetings when people are not aware of, especially during the odd hours (Midnight) and far away from residence (in the bush most often time). These individuals keep their activities secret from non-members and people in the society. Cultism induces a feeling of insecurity which causes psycho-pathology concerns (fear or anxiety) in educational institutions today (Oneteet *al.*, 2012). The activities of these secret cults have sent hundreds of students out of school and to early grave. Unfortunately, these secret cults have spread to the nation's secondary schools. They have signs and symbols that may not make any meaning to outsiders. Their activities have negative effects on members and non-members as well as the entire school (Umanah, 2018).

#### *Poverty*

Poverty is a state of dispossession and deprivation in which people are denied of their income, opportunity, empowerment, dignity, decency and sensibilities. Eromosele (1993) described poverty as "a state of insecurity, death, deficiency, the condition of lacking desirable elements. Connell (1969) described various cycle of poverty. People with low income are prone to illness, limitation on mobility, limited access to education, information and training. They therefore find it difficult for their children to improve the status. The cruel legacy of poverty is passed from parents to children. In 1998, according to the editorial comment of a tabloid in Nigeria-Nigeria Tribune, Nigeria was ranked 17th poorest country in the world, and that between 1985 and 1992, extreme poverty increased from 10 million people to 13.9 million. The top 10 percent earn more than 40 percent of the gross income, with balance of 60 percent going to 90 percent of the population. In 2007, 70 percent of Nigerians were reportedly earning equivalent of one dollar per day (Magstadt, 2009). Street-begging among vast majority of citizens is a common phenomenon. The situation is worse off in the Northern part of the country where alms taking has become a norm. The matter is made worse by wide unequally between the rich (in most cases, past military rulers or politicians) and the poor masses.

The distributive injustices place a lot of tension on the school and its curriculum as teacher often embark on strikes to press for fair income. Incessant strikes action obviously has compromised standard of education. Poverty negatively affects students' academic ability especially when teachers are poorly paid too assertive promotion or been motivated. This can also occurred as a result of exploitation from the principal to the students through sorting to upgrade their continuous assessment (CA) to get higher grade during or before the examination (Oyinlola, 2009).

*Academic Ability and Students' Knowledge of Social Issues and Concepts: The Social Studies Effect*

Social Studies education is a subject that develops in learners the right type of values and attitudes that are needed to create a peaceful and sustainable society. Social Studies education teaches values that would enable peaceful social integration in students. Values like maintenance of discipline, respect for law and order, recognition of the principles of cultural relativity and the effect of cultural ethnocentrism, respect for other people's rights, formation of social competency, and citizenship education (Adesina & Odejebi, 2011). These values are important factors in the human relationship with society and essential for the development of the individuals as contributing members in the society.

Through Social Studies, students are able to learn both physical and cognitive skills that will help them develop strong learning skills for life. They can also learn self-help skills that will help them to cope with issues as they grow.

## VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This work has established that there is logical link or relationship between academic ability, students' knowledge of social issues and concepts in Social Studies. After carrying out the review, the review showed that Intellectual Skills (critical thinking and problem solving) are parts of social studies skills that relate to students' academic ability. With good knowledge of these social skills, students will be able to confidently overcome the challenges of social issues or problems in the society. This is an indication that, if students have good understanding of social concepts, skills and values, they will certainly do well in Social Studies but if in the process of learning, they develop deviant behaviours due to poor knowledge of social concepts and issues, it will as well affect their academic ability as they will lose their self-confident and ability to proffer solution to societal issues and subsequently affect their academic performance in school.

Also, improving students' academic ability must not be teacher's responsibility alone but also by inculcating more moral value teaching into the curriculum of Social Studies education. This can be done through effective implementation of Social Studies curriculum at all level of secondary school education in order to enlightening students in senior secondary classes on the dangerous effects of poor knowledge of social issues and concepts in social studies education. In

addition, an effective and reliable financial management system can be established to control the use of educational resources. Financial incentives could also be given to officials who have been proven to be 'immunized' to corruption because the educational institutions have critical role in supporting knowledge driven economic growth strategies an obvious requirement for global competition. It is importance, generally accepted that the academic ability of Nigerian students is in deep turmoil due to corrupt practices.

Finally, it is important to state that creating a new curriculum that would meet the criteria of encouraging students to be academically dependent and reject social vices in schools is not possible to accomplish without solving the problem of poor implementation of Social Studies curriculum in schools. The fact remains that Social Studies is embedded with adequate social skills and values that could influence students' academic ability.

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