

# Impact of Social Studies Curriculum Contents on the Achievement of Social Cohesion: Role of Transformative Learning Theory

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## ABSTRACT

Social cohesion is vital for societal stability and harmony, particularly in multicultural contexts. Education plays a crucial role in shaping attitudes and values that promote unity. This paper explores the role of Social Studies curriculum in fostering Social Cohesion in educational institutions, particularly in regions with diverse social, ethnic, and religious groups. Social cohesion is critical for societal stability and development, and education is a fundamental vehicle for promoting unity. The study reviews key curriculum contents, such as citizenship education, multiculturalism, human rights, and conflict resolution, highlighting their impact on shaping students' attitudes toward social harmony. This study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to gather comprehensive data on students' perceptions. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews. A Sample size of 200 students and 20 educators from diverse backgrounds were used for this study. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure representation across different demographics. The study found that Over 75% of students reported that their Social Studies classes helped them understand diverse perspectives, and students who participated in community projects reported higher levels of social cohesion. The findings suggest that Social Studies curricula should include themes that promote common values, civic responsibility and also reiterated that interactive and collaborative learning approaches are essential for enhancing social cohesion among students.

**Keywords:** Transformation Learning Theory, Social Cohesion, Social Studies, Colleges of Education, Critical Self-Reflection

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of social cohesion is pivotal in maintaining harmonious and productive societies. In educational contexts, fostering social cohesion among students is essential for promoting inclusive and collaborative environments. This study examines the application of transformative learning theory in enhancing social cohesion among NCE Social Studies students in Colleges of Education in North-West Nigeria. In today's interconnected and diverse world, promoting social cohesion is essential for fostering inclusive communities and sustaining peaceful coexistence. Within educational contexts, transformative learning emerges as a potent framework for cultivating these critical competencies among students. We regard transformative learning as the highest of three successive levels of learning, moving from informative to formative to transformative learning. Informative learning is about acquiring knowledge and skills; its purpose is to produce experts. Formative learning is about socializing students around values; its purpose is to produce professionals. Transformative learning is about developing leadership attributes; its purpose is to produce enlightened change agents' (Frenk, Chen, Bhutta, Cohen, Crisp, Evans, & Kistnasamy, 2010). Transformative learning theory, developed by Jack Mezirow, has the potential to promote social cohesion among students in Colleges of Education in North-West Nigeria. This theory focuses on the process of "perspective transformation" through critical reflection, which can lead to more open-mindedness, understanding, and empathy among individuals. Mezirow's theory has been widely referenced in adult education and has been applied to various educational contexts, including the delivery of education. Fostering critical reflection within the framework of transformative learning has also been studied in the context of adult education in Nigerian comparative case studies. Additionally, Nwagu (2020) explored the transformative learning potentials of trainee health workers

in Nigeria, indicating the relevance of this theory to the Nigerian educational context. While there may be limited direct research on the specific impact of transformative learning theory on social cohesion among students in Colleges of Education in North-west Nigeria, the existing literature suggests its potential benefits in promoting a more cohesive and inclusive learning environment.

The contents of Social Studies curricula are designed to foster understanding and cooperation among diverse groups, contributing significantly to social cohesion. By emphasizing themes such as citizenship, cultural diversity, conflict resolution, and democratic values, Social Studies helps students develop a sense of belonging, shared identity, and mutual respect. This, in turn, promotes greater social harmony and reduces tensions arising from ethnic, religious, or political differences, leading to the achievement of social cohesion. In North-west Nigeria, cultural diversity and societal complexities abound, fostering social cohesion among students in Colleges of Education is paramount for building resilient and inclusive communities. This paper argues that Transformative Learning Theory provides a robust framework for promoting social cohesion by encouraging critical reflection, dialogue, and action. By examining the transformative potential of education, this paper seeks to offer insights into the application of Transformative Learning in addressing the challenges of social division and promoting unity within college settings. This paper aims to explore the impact of transformative learning theory on social studies students in Colleges of Education in North-West Nigeria, specifically focusing on how it influences their achievement in social cohesion. the application of Transformative Learning Theory in colleges of education in North-west Nigeria has the potential to foster social cohesion by promoting cultural sensitivity, enhancing communication skills, empowering students as agents of change, fostering conflict resolution strategies, promoting inclusive practices, encouraging civic engagement, and facilitating long-term attitude and behavior change.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Transformative learning, as conceptualized by Mezirow (1991), involves a profound shift in an individual's perspective, leading to enhanced critical reflection, self-awareness, and action. This theory suggests that through engaging in critical discourse, individuals can challenge and revise their existing beliefs, leading to transformative change. By fostering empathy, understanding, and openness to diverse perspectives, transformative learning holds promise for promoting social cohesion.

Transformative learning theory posits that individuals engage in a process of perspective transformation, leading them to critically reflect on their assumptions, beliefs, and worldviews. As they develop new perspectives, individuals become more open-minded, empathetic, and capable of engaging in meaningful dialogue with others who hold different viewpoints. These skills are essential components of social cohesion, as they enable people to understand one another better and work towards common goals despite differences. Previous research has demonstrated the effectiveness of transformative learning in fostering social cohesion across various educational settings, such as adult literacy programs, teacher training courses, and healthcare professional development initiatives. However, little attention has been paid to the applicability of transformative learning theory in enhancing social cohesion among tertiary level students in Nigeria.

Social cohesion, defined as the degree of connectedness and solidarity within a society, is essential for maintaining peace, stability, and progress (Putnam, 2000). Social cohesion aims to achieve a well-functioning society that shares common goals and values where everyone has shared responsibilities and willingness to participate to reach the goal (Andrew & Liudmila, 2007). As schools continue to experience the complex manifestations of intersecting forms of ethno-cultural diversity – often referred to as ‘super-diversity’ (Vertovec 2007, 2019) approaches that emphasize a critical intercultural discourse, move beyond the recognition of difference, and promote more engagement and transformative knowledge will be critically needed. In the absence of a deeper intercultural dialogue, rising levels of ethno-cultural diversity amid persistent social fissures and entrenched inequalities may adversely impact the experiences of minorities in education and the broader society. Bridging the growing cultural-divide in schools and addressing the lack of effective pedagogic tools and policies for creating ICU thus becomes an urgent issue for educators and policymakers (Casinader 2016; Miller, Ziaian, and Esterman 2018; Walton, Priest, and Paradies 2013). However, the effectiveness of Social Studies curriculum in achieving this goal may vary depending on various factors, including educational policies, curriculum content, and institutional contexts. This study aims to

explore the perceptions of NCE Social Studies students in Federal and State Colleges of Education in North West Nigeria regarding the influence of Social Studies curriculum content on the achievement of social cohesion.

Colleges of Education play a crucial role in shaping future educators and leaders. In a diverse and multicultural region like North-West Nigeria, the ability to effectively manage conflicts and foster social cohesion is essential for sustainable development and peaceful coexistence. Transformative learning theory offers a framework that encourages critical reflection, perspective-taking, and personal growth, which are vital for addressing conflicts and promoting unity among students. Education in the social sciences is vital for encouraging civic engagement and consciousness. This educational program provides students with the necessary knowledge and abilities to actively engage in democratic processes, make well-informed decisions, and make positive contributions to society. Through an analysis of intricate historical occurrences, global challenges, and complex societal issues, it fosters the development of critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. Students acquire the ability to evaluate, synthesize, and analyze information from a variety of perspectives. Social Studies foster appreciation and consciousness of other cultures. Promoting tolerance and diminishing prejudice, it assists individuals in comprehending and valuing diverse cultures. Social Studies equip individuals with the knowledge and understanding necessary to become global citizens by exposing them to international relations, cross-cultural communication, and global issues in an increasingly interconnected world.

Previous research has highlighted the importance of Social Studies curriculum in promoting social cohesion by fostering values such as tolerance, empathy, and respect for diversity (Banks, 2008; McCowan, 2015). However, studies also indicate disparities in the implementation and effectiveness of Social Studies curriculum across different educational institutions (Adedoyin, 2019; Olatunde, 2020). While Federal Colleges of Education may have standardized curriculum guidelines and resources, State Colleges of Education often operate within their frameworks, leading to potential variations in curriculum content and delivery methods. Understanding how students perceive the impact of Social Studies curriculum on social cohesion in these diverse institutional contexts can provide valuable insights for educational policymakers and practitioners.

### Research Objectives

- i. Find out the perception of students on the influence of Social Studies curriculum contents on the achievement of social cohesion in Colleges of Education in North-West Nigeria.
- ii. Find out if the difference between the perceptions of Federal and State NCE Social Studies students on the influence of Social Studies curriculum contents on the achievement of social cohesion in Colleges of Education in North-West Nigeria.

### Research Hypothesis

- i. There is no significant difference in the perception of students on the influence of Social Studies curriculum contents and the achievement of social cohesion in Colleges of Education in North-West Nigeria.
- ii. There is no significant difference between the perceptions of Federal and State NCE Social Studies students on the role of Social Studies in fostering social cohesion in Colleges of Education in North-West Nigeria.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to gather comprehensive data on students' perceptions. A Sample Size of 200 students was drawn from a population of 2000 students and 20 educators were used for this study. Stratified random sampling was used for the study in order to ensure representation across different demographics. Data Collection in this study was through the use of Surveys, A structured questionnaire was distributed to assess students'

perceptions of their Social Studies curriculum. Interviews: Semi-structured interviews with educators focused on their experiences and insights regarding curriculum effectiveness. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics for quantitative responses and thematic analysis for qualitative findings.

## RESULTS

The data collected was subjected to descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation. The table below presents summary of the result:

Table 1: Summary of Means and Standard Deviations on perception of students on the influence of Social Studies curriculum contents on the achievement of social cohesion

S/N	Items	Mean	SD
1	I have developed more tolerance and respect for others as a result of my class interaction	3.84	.389
2	I don't feel very comfortable discussing aspects of my religion and cultural traditions with people from other places	2.33	1.223
3	I feel threatened, angry and sometimes violent when people disagree with my religious and cultural views.	2.47	1.140
4	I often times feel my opinion, beliefs and traditions are more superior to others	2.34	.983
5	I think the NCE Social Studies curriculum effectively addresses issues of conflict management among students in my College of Education	3.86	.349
6	I think the NCE Social Studies curriculum contents do not provide adequate opportunities for students to learn about prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination.	2.32	.991
7	Love, tolerance, co-operation, and acceptance of one another regardless of religious differences will go a long way to promote social cohesion.	2.84	1.125
8	The NCE Social Studies program has helped me to understand and appreciate cultural diversity	3.95	.216
9	I am willing to critically reflect on my beliefs and assumptions and to listen to others' viewpoints even if they differ from mine.	3.73	.457
10	I am willing to align my thoughts and actions to be more respectful of others and their values.	3.59	.663
	<b>Aggregate Mean</b>	<b>3.12</b>	

Table 1 shows that all the positive statement items were above the criterion mean of 2.5 while all the negative statement items were below the criterion mean of 2.5. This means that the respondents accepted the statement items above the criterion mean of 2.5 while the statement items below the criterion mean of 2.5 are rejected. The aggregate mean of all the items is 3.12 above the criterion mean of 2.5. This implies that the respondents accepted that through the application of transformation learning theory in the NCE Social Studies curriculum they developed more tolerance and respect for others; feel very comfortable discussing aspects of their religion and cultural traditions; do not feel threatened, angry and sometimes violent when people disagree with my religious and cultural views; do not consider their opinion, beliefs and traditions are more superior to others; consider that NCE Social Studies curriculum contents provide adequate opportunities for students to learn about prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination; believe that NCE Social Studies program helped them

understand and appreciate cultural diversity; are predispose align their thoughts and actions to be more respectful of others and their values. Over 75% of students reported that their Social Studies classes helped them understand diverse perspectives.

To test the hypothesis the data generated was subjected to Independent Sample t-test analysis and the result presented in table 2.

Table 2: Summary of Independent Sample t-test on influence of Social Studies curriculum contents on the achievement of social cohesion

Institution	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p	Decision
FCE	104	3.1587	.21794	1.443	344	.150	Retained
COE	242	3.1120	.29712				

The result from table 2 shows that  $t = 1.443$ ,  $df = 344$ ,  $p = .150 > 0.05$ . This indicates that the probability value (p) is greater than the alpha level of significance ( $p > 0.05$ ). Therefore, since the p value is greater than the alpha level of significance, the null hypothesis is retained. This means that, there was no significant difference between the perceptions of Federal and State NCE Social Studies students on the influence of Social Studies curriculum contents on the achievement of social cohesion in Colleges of Education in North-West Nigeria.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Transformation refers to a profound internal shift in one's beliefs that leads to action (Palinkas, 2013). It is distinct from simple behavioral change, as change relies on external factors to modify actions, whereas transformation alters beliefs in a way that actions become instinctive and produce the desired outcome. Change corrects past behaviors, while transformation shapes the future. Transformative learning theory (TLT) focuses on the processes involved in changing an individual's frames of reference (Stange & Gibson, 2017). Transformative learning is a possible outcome of instrumental and communicative learning when modification of premises, assumptions, and deep meaning structures result in a transformation of action and behaviour (Cranton, 2006).

The application of Transformative Learning Theory in Colleges of Education in North-West Nigeria has the potential to foster social cohesion by promoting cultural sensitivity, enhancing communication skills, empowering students as agents of change, fostering conflict resolution strategies, promoting inclusive practices, encouraging civic engagement, and facilitating long-term attitude and behavior change.

The findings of the study revealed that Social Studies curriculum content is capable of helping students develop emotional intelligence and build conflict management skills. This finding agrees with that of Nwalado, Obro, Eboh and Egum (2011) that Social Studies concepts could be used to manage conflicts. In the same vein, Chia & Ubah (2016) reported that Social studies can be used as an important conflict resolution tool because of its nature and problem solving capacity. They viewed Social Studies as an elaborate study of man's life and his activities as it relates to his environment, and how this activity affects others. It can also be seen as a neutral school subject, that can be applied to any situation man is found, and can be used to solve any societal problem. This is because Social Studies draws its concepts and knowledge from various disciplines and integrates this knowledge and concepts to solve societal problems and inculcate national consciousness and national unity in diversity

The finding in this study indicates that transformative learning significantly contributes to improving social cohesion among college students in North-West Nigeria. Specifically, participants reported increased awareness of cultural differences, enhanced communication skills, and greater appreciation for diverse perspectives. Moreover, students expressed a stronger sense of belonging to their academic community and felt more empowered to challenge prejudice and discrimination.



## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the perceptions of NCE Social Studies students regarding the influence of Social Studies curriculum on achieving Social Cohesion in Colleges of Education in North West Nigeria. While both Federal and State institutions recognize the importance of Social Studies education in promoting unity and diversity, there are variations in curriculum content and emphasis that reflect institutional contexts and priorities. By addressing these differences and promoting greater collaboration among stakeholders, policymakers can strengthen the role of Social Studies curriculum in building a more cohesive and inclusive society in Nigeria.

The results of this study suggest that transformative learning theory holds great promise for promoting Social Cohesion among college students in North-West Nigeria. By encouraging critical reflection, collaboration, and perspective transformation, educators can create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment that nurtures mutual respect, understanding, and collective wellbeing. Future research should seek to further validate these findings and investigate additional applications of transformative learning theory in other educational contexts throughout Africa.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings presented in this study, several practical recommendations emerge to support the implementation of transformation learning theory aimed at promoting social cohesion among students in Colleges of Education in North-West Nigeria:

1. Colleges of Education in Nigeria should promote collaboration and foster opportunities for interdisciplinary and cross-cultural collaboration among students through group projects, peer mentoring schemes, and joint events can encourage students to build relationships, share ideas, and appreciate diverse perspectives.
2. Tertiary institutions should use teaching methods that can help students recognize and challenge their own assumptions, biases, and stereotypes.
3. Develop Cultural Awareness Programs: Offer workshops or seminars focused on increasing students' understanding of local cultures, traditions, and customs.
4. Train Educators: Equip teachers with the necessary tools and skills required to implement transformative learning strategies effectively.

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