

Teachers' Attitudes to Social Studies and Students' Academic Performance in Junior Secondary Three-Certificate Examination

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigated teachers' attitudes toward social studies. Three hundred and thirteen students took part in the study. These respondents were randomly selected from fourteen public secondary schools in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. Questionnaire and junior secondary three-certificate examination results provided the data for this research. Finding revealed that teachers with positive attitude toward social studies, the students performed better than those who perceived the same teachers' attitude as negative.

Keywords: Teachers' attitudes toward social studies, academic performance

INTRODUCTION

MacDonald (2005) describes an attitude as "a predisposition to act in a positive or negative way towards persons, objects, ideas and events" (p. 308) several studies conducted on teachers' attitudes, a few of which Kratz (2009), Sweeney (2002) have shown that teachers' attitudes are important factors in the learning process as well as in academic performance. Kratz found a significant difference between teachers' attitudes and students' academic performance. Learning social studies brings the teacher into contact with contents, goals, teaching methods, classroom environment and students. His disposition towards the above reveals a positive or negative attitude. Examining this concept further Smith, Sarason & Sarason (2002) identify three constituents of attitude: cognitive (beliefs), emotional (feeling) and behavioral (action). The cognitive component by itself is not an attitude. It transcends into feeling and then metamorphoses into action; the final stage is attitude formation. In other words, action may be part of the attitude one has towards a thing person or phenomenon.

In his studies, Sterm (2003) concludes that, "the basic assumption underlying all these is that teachers' attitudes are significant for students' learning" (p. 424). Social Studies have been noted to be integrated both in content and methodology. The introduction of new approaches to learning the subject needed a change in the education of teachers. Literature review on the background of teachers teaching the new social studies at any school level shows that majority of them had their education with humanities or social science background.

Social studies teachers seem to lack the consensus about the nature and importance of the subject. Many of them appear to exhibit a negative understanding of the subject (Uyoata, 1992). However, despite the general misunderstanding, Uyoata observes that 65 percent of the primary school teachers in his study expressed a positive attitude to social studies. In the said study, most of the teachers preferred social studies as separate subject such as history, civics, moral instruction and geography. The teachers' positive attitude, therefore, might have been built on the preference for multidisciplinary approach, which has now been discarded for the integrated approach.

Osho (2006) undertook a study where he observes, among others, that teachers with positive attitude (who were exposed to the problem-solving strategy) had higher gains from the post-

treatment scores on their performance in social studies than their colleagues who used other methods. Cruickshank, Jenkins & Metcalf (2003) write that effective teachers are generally positive minded individuals who believe in the success of their students as well as their own ability to help students to achieve. Borich (2000) contends that effective teachers are those who use “meaningful verbal praise to get and keep students actively participating in the learning process” (p. 15). In the Nigerian classroom situation, it is observed that many teachers’ regards social studies as a low status subject that could be taught any-how (Okon 2007) hence making social studies hazy and distorted in image. Okon further contends that prospective social studies students tend to have doubt regarding the high status of the subject. Hobbs & Moroz (2001) found in their studies that students believed social studies was useful but did not believe that social studies would help them get a job. Among the social sciences, people seem to think of social studies, as low status subject (Hobbs & Moroz 2001).

Teachers’ attitudes toward social studies have implications for the successful teaching of essential skills and values, which are central to the social studies education. Research on enthusiasm of the teacher is strongly connected to students’ success Spark, (2008). Cruickshank, Jenkins and Metcalf (2003) report that effective teachers are enthusiastic over their work.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study was to investigate teachers’ attitudes toward social studies and the consequent effect on students’ academic performance in the Junior Secondary Three Certificate Examination in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State.

RESEARCH QUESTION

To guide this study, one research question was formulated: What is the difference between teachers’ attitudes toward social studies and students’ academic performance in the subject?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

In order to provide answer to the above research question this hypothesis was formulated: there is no significant difference between teachers’ attitudes and students’ academic performance.

METHODOLOGY

The survey research design was employed for this study. It suits this study because its concerns itself with facts or pieces of information and present such information as they are.

Table 1. t-test of Teachers’ Attitudes Toward Social Studies by Rating of the students (N = 313)

<i>Teachers’ Attitudes</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>t-value</i>
Positive	241	66.02	3.46	
Negative	72	65.56	3.52	8.02
<i>Total</i>	<i>313</i>	<i>65.91</i>	<i>3.47</i>	

* P<0.05; df 231; critical t = 1.96.

The participants for this study consisted of 313 Junior Secondary Three Social Studies students – 157 males and 156 females. These subjects were selected using stratified random sampling technique. Hence, the participants were randomly selected from the fourteen government owned secondary schools in Uyo Local Government Area. All the participants took a 14-item Likert-type questionnaire designed by the researchers to investigate teachers’

attitudes toward social studies. The results of the participants' attitudes were used to classify the subjects into two groups: positive and negative. The data are presented in table 1.

The mean score was 66.02 and the standard deviation was 3.46. The participants' mean scores with 66.02 and above were considered as rating the teachers' attitude as "positive" while participants who scored below the mean were considered as rating the teachers' attitude as "negative". All the respondents offered social studies as a core subject at the junior secondary school level.

The research instruments were Teachers' Attitudes Rating Scale (TARS) (developed by the researchers) and Students' Performance Scores in Social Studies (SPSSS).

TEACHERS' ATTITUDES RATING SCALE (TARS)

The Teachers' Attitudes Rating Scale contained 18 test items in all and was divided into two sections. Section A had only three test items, which dealt with students' personal data. Section B consisted of 15 Likert-type items. It assessed students' rating of teachers' attitudes toward social studies: that is how teachers feel about social studies positively or negatively. Each test item on the questionnaire asked students to indicate their feelings about a particular statement. Pilot testing of the scale showed it to be fairly reliable with a Cronbach alpha coefficient equal 0.78.

Students' Performance Scores in Social Studies (SPSSS)

The Junior Secondary Three Certificate Examination results of 2012/2013 academic session, which was set and centrally marked by the State Government: (social studies teachers from various schools within the state marked the scripts) provided the achievement data.

Teachers' Attitudes Rating Scale (TARS) instrument was administered on the respondents at an arranged date and time with the assistance of the class teachers in the schools involved in the study. The respondents were given 45 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The responses given by the participants on the test items, on the questionnaire together with the performance scores in the end-of - the-programme or course examination results provided the data for the analysis.

RESULT

The result showed that there was a significant difference between teachers' attitudes toward social studies and students' academic performance. That is to say teachers who have positive attitude toward social studies, the students performed better than students who perceived the teachers' attitude as negative. This is indicated by the evident that the calculated t-value of 8.02, which is greater than the critical t-value of 1.96 at 0.05 alpha levels with 231 degree of freedom.

The result indicated that students who rated their teachers' attitude as positive performed better in social studies than those who perceived the same teachers' attitude as negative hence, the null hypothesis was rejected.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of the study based on the result showed that students who rated their teachers as having positive attitude toward social studies performed better in the end-of-the programme (Junior Secondary Three Certificate Examination JSCE) than those who perceived their teachers attitude as negative. This result is supported by Kratz (2009) who opined that teachers' attitudes influence students' academic performance. As revealed by the finding of

this study, teachers' attitudes have positive or negative influence on the students thus affecting their performance also positively or negatively.

The rating of teachers' attitude as being positive has reflected on the respondents' superior academic performance in social studies in junior secondary three certificate examination falls in line with the research conducted by Crunckshank, Jenkin & Mercalf (2003). They reported that enthusiasm on the side of the teacher is strongly connected to students' success. Thus, their superior academic performance; they concluded.

SUGGESTION OFFERED FOR IMPROVEMENT

This study revealed that there is a significant influence of teachers' attitudes on students' academic performance in social studies in junior secondary three-certificate examination. The implication is that students who perceived their teachers' attitude as positive performed better than their counterparts who perceived the same teachers' attitude as negative. Cruickshank, Jenkins & Metcalf (2003) asserted that effective teachers are generally positive minded individuals who believe in themselves and in the success of their students as well as their own ability to help students to achieve. Therefore teachers should develop positive attitude toward social studies in order to help the students to succeed in their academic endeavours.

CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions are drawn from this study:

1. Students who perceived their teachers' attitude as positive did better than those who perceived their teachers' attitude as negative.
2. Effective teachers are positive minded individuals who believe in themselves and how to help students to succeed.
3. Teachers' attitudes are capable of affecting students' performance positively or negatively.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made based on the finding of this study:

1. Teachers should be motivated by the government through regular payment of salaries and allowances and be promoted as at when due.
2. Government should organize workshops and seminars to rekindle teachers' interesting in teaching.
3. In-service programme should be encouraged to update teachers' knowledge and extend their intellectual horizon.

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