

## Functional Language: A Panacea for Effective Implementation of the Primary School Social Studies Curriculum

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### **Abstract**

*This paper focuses on what constitutes functional language of instruction with a view to determining the extent at which it influences effective teaching delivery by Social Studies teacher and the attainment of Social Studies curriculum objectives. Two hypotheses were formulated based on research questions on significant relationship between and among identified variables viz- a-viz teachers knowledge of core- concepts, academic qualification, students' academic performance, attainment of curriculum objectives and the functional language. The study employed quasi- experimental design, 20 Social Studies teachers and 200 students were selected from Junior Secondary Schools in Ojo Local Government area of Lagos state. Close- ended questionnaire constructed for teachers contains 20 statement items on a 4 – point likert rating scale and validated with a reliability co- efficient of 0.58. Achievement test was also constructed for the students and data was analysed using F - Test and pearson product moment correlation (PPMC). The finding reveals that: teachers' knowledge of core- concepts and academic qualifications has nothing to do with the use of functional language and vice-versa. The implication of this was deeply discussed. It was therefore recommended that, to attain Social Studies curriculum objectives, there is the need by the teachers to have knowledge of liberal arts, language education and the acquisition of appropriate diction, which implies the use of functional language; and there is a symbolic relationship between students' academic performance and the use of functional language in the teaching and learning of Social Studies.*

**Keywords:** Basic Education, Curriculum, Social Studies, Language, Panacea

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## **Introduction**

A lot of teachings of teaching method are at the tip of teachers fingers; of major concern is the teaching practices of these methods. In the first instance, the quest to know the core conception of the knowledge of the method and its practical application to ensure effective delivery of teaching practices, which often influences the process of adoption of the method with variation. In another connection, there is the concern on how the teacher utilizes knowledge acquired appropriately to their teaching practices.

Over the years, since the introduction of Social Studies as a single social science subject to Nigeria educational curriculum, and in spite of efforts by various agencies, it is seemingly impossible to conclude that the objectives have been attained. A lot of researches have been conducted on methods and other instructional strategies, core- teaching conceptions on the part of the teachers. Recommendations also abounds while efforts is being given to the role of functional language, effective communication, and the use of appropriate diction for the clarification of concepts in the context of the subject Social Studies. In the learning of Social Studies and in the consideration of the objectives it seeks to achieve. These objectives which are classified into 3 three are knowledge, skills and attitudes. Its articulation will produce a knowledge citizen who will not only be useful to himself but also to the society at large. It is against this background that instructional strategy must be considered most especially in the area of functional communication on the part of the teachers. It is pertinent to mention here that, the use of words and the understanding of the structure that makes up language in verbal ability of the teachers are essential.

On this terrestrial land, man is said to be the only one among creatures that use language in terms of words. Language is being acquired by man through listening, speaking, reading and wringing. Owing to the complex nature of Social Studies as a single subjects whose principles, laws, theories and concepts correlates like Economics, Geography, Political Science, Sociology, Anthropology etc. (Lawal, 2005). Teaching core concepts in integrated manner, the need for multidisciplinary approach must be put in place through – the use of functional language.

## **Language as a Component of Effective Teaching**

Lawal (2005), reaffirms that scholars of linguistics have not able been able to determine finally the origin of language. They are however sure that spoken language developed well before written language. The best they have only been able to do has been speculate. Equally, variety of sources which focuses on biblical injunction, the natural sound source which sees a number of words in any languages been onomatopoeic (echoing natural sounds) and the oral gesture source. Whichever source one is considering for the purpose of explaining the origin of language, it is basically meant to be used as a tool of interaction. It has a transactional function which enables human beings to use their linguistic abilities to communicate knowledge skills, and information, which forms the core objectives of social studies. This makes language the life blood of any culture. It is the privileged medium through which we make sense of the world we live in.

Language is therefore the key instrument for sharing thoughts and controlling the mind. Language not only permits an enormous condensation of knowledge, but permits human beings to turn the knowledge into hypothetical forms so that they may consider alternatives without having to act them in the form of trial and error (Fafunwa, 1990). Language as a cultural component is a major instrument used by the people to identify themselves as a member of a

group or for taking decision to be primarily self- identified as a member of a given community. It prescribes the mode of communication, within community. It prescribes the mode of communication, within any cultural setting (Abegunrin, 2006). Language is also an instrument of social interaction. This is based on the principle which sees communication; a major component of language, as very essential for disseminating information and perhaps teaching.

Ajetunmobi (2002), sees language as an aspect of cultural control mechanism which influences individual decisions and promotes social accountability which is very essential for teaching and learning of social studies. It is therefore a social capital needed for understanding a variety of issues, be it political, economic, environmental or social in any cultural setting and academic exercise. Lawal (2005), came to a conclusion that language as a major component of any cultural setting can be seen as none lenses with which people view their environment, a motive for human behaviour, a criterion of revaluation in terms of good, bad and ugly, one of the basis of identity and principally a mode of communication.

### **Definitions of Social Studies**

The compound concept of Social Studies is used interchangeably with two basic terms, Social Science; it has its own distinct features and purposes. Social Studies as a curriculum area have no universal definition. This is because Social Studies, unlike most other school disciplines are culture bound. The focus of the subject changes from time to time, thus the flexibility and differences in definitions. However, it is significant to note that certain basic agreement exist in the various definitions represent a miscegenation of definition proffered by Olawepo, (1993).

Social Studies in primary and post-primary institutions are thus, not concerned with maintaining the other disciplines as separate subjects, although teachers link them with the subject. Indeed, Social Studies is the modern attempt at an interdisciplinary study of a topic, a problem, an issue, a concern, or an aspiration (Aboluwarin, 2016). Makinde (1979), is more concerned about effective teaching of Social Studies and this inform his definition of Social Studies as an integrated approach to studying man, his institution, his environment and their interactions. Its purview covers different subject disciplines, predominantly social sciences. It is therefore a synthesis of aspects of anthropology, economics, geography, history, philosophy, political science, social psychology, and religion and health education. It is also interested in the influence of science and technology on human beings, human institutions and human environment. Thus, it is an eclectic subject that sees knowledge about man and his environment in an organic whole and must be studied in that whole. Furthermore, components of that organic whole must be well understood with their inter-relationships. This is based on the philosophical framework of reference that issues concerning human beings have some historical, geographical, economical, sociological, technological, scientific and other dimensions simultaneously.

### **Scope and Nature of School Social Studies Curriculum**

The Comparative Education Study and Adaptation Centre (CESAC 1977) of the University of Lagos have been very actively involved in curriculum development, including Social Studies syllabuses and textbooks. For instance it drafted both the junior secondary school (JSS) syllabus and the senior secondary school in 1977. The JSS syllabus has been approved by the National Council on Education and it is being implemented in all schools in Nigeria since 1982 through NERDC. Social Studies is a core subject ‘at the JSS level.

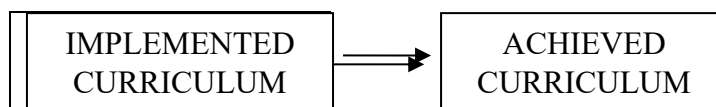
## The Implementation of Social Studies Curriculum

In a bid to delineate boundaries of definitions and reviewing the concept of curriculum implementation, it is necessary to state that by curriculum, it means a document handed down to the school and then to the classroom teacher to guide him as to the knowledge, skills and attitudes that his learners should develop at the end of the school year. This document receives final approval from the National Council on Education (NCE) after vetting by the Joint Consultative Committee on Education (JCCE) for Primary and Secondary School curricula. The National Universities Commission (NUC), National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) take charge of curriculum development efforts for the universities, polytechnics and colleges of education respectively. The Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) are charged with the national co-ordination of these efforts especially for pre-university curricula (Okebukola et al, 2004).

What is traditionally referred to as the curriculum and on which the above definition is based has the following major components: Topic, Content, Objectives, Teacher's and pupil Activities and Evaluation of intended learning outcome in subjects of Social Studies.

### Curriculum implementation

This is the translation of the objectives of the curriculum from paper to practices. The process begins when the teachers handles the curriculum and ends when learners' have been exposed to the learning experience prescribed in the document. The intermediate steps include teaching through verbal and non-verbal, exposition functional language, practical work in laboratories, workshops and in the field, student-student interactions, student material interactions and then evaluation and feedback. The measure of how well the curriculum is implemented is the degree to which the outcome behaviour of the beneficiaries match the anticipated outcome specified in the curriculum. It is this measure that had led to the idea of the intended, implemented and achieved curriculum. The intended curriculum is what, for instance, the NCE has approved, the implemented curriculum is the component of the intended curriculum that the teacher works with, while the achieved curriculum is what learners finally end up with in terms of knowledge, skills and attitude development.



*Diagram 1 showing expected correspondence between intended, implemented and achieved curricular*

### Functional Languages and Linkages to Social Studies

In Nigeria today, just like many African countries that are multilingual, most especially the Anglophone. English language is being adopted as a second language (L.2) and in most cases the official language of communication (Lingua Franca). It serves as a medium of instruction in schools, mass media, politics, trade and commerce, indeed it is serving as a common bond and unifying factor in this highly cultural and ethnic linguistic heterogeneous society.

Axiomatically, these facts premised on the post-modernist and post structuralism assumption that language constitutes the human world and the human world constitutes the whole world. Hence, language could be seen as constantly moving independent force that influences a group

of people's belief about environment which in turn affects their ability to contribute effectively to the development of their society or nation as Social Studies focuses on man and how he influences the environment. The content of Social Studies is unique in the sense that it is well translated, it follows that the teacher needs a reasonable mastery of language arts to be able to read and understand Social Studies texts and work books; listen to and understand the pupil's difficulties. In this regard, Olawepo (2003), examines the curriculum relevance of language arts as an integral part of Social Studies thus; it includes the four basic applications of language: writing, reading speaking and listening. Each language skill, although dealt with separately for the purpose of skill and exercise, eventually is fused into the usage patterns of conventional human communication.

Historically, evidence abound that people move their children from public schools to private schools because of many reasons, principal among the beliefs is that English language form the mode of instruction and that the teachers are more committed.

### **The Concept of Evaluation in Social Studies**

Evaluation is day-to-day decision of determination of activities, events, process, objects and other things around us. Such determinations are based on the worth of the materials, experiences or events. These are things like teaching improvement programme, curriculum innovation and so on. Inherent in the idea of evaluation is being engaged in some process that is designed to provide information that will help to make judgement about a given situation.

Evaluation makes it possible for teachers to monitor the effects of teaching on learners. In other words, this implies collecting information about one's work, interpreting the information and making value judgements about which action should be taken to improve practice. Evaluation could also be seen as appraisal, assessment, estimation or ascertaining the level of achievement. Evaluation is equally the establishment of the extent to which specific objectives have been attained.

### **Appraisal of Literature Review**

Akinrolabu (2008), was concern about factors hindering effective teaching of Social Studies. A study was carried out on the relationship among verbal ability of the teachers ,socio-economic status and students' achievement in Social Studies. While Babarinde (2008), emphasize functional language, the study revealed a weak relationship between two variables (verbal ability and socio-economic status) and achievement in Social Studies. The fact cannot be denied that many factors inhibit the attainment of curriculum objectives of Social Studies and if properly addressed the society will experience a turn around.

### **Hypotheses**

- H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant relationship among teachers' knowledge of core-concepts, academic qualifications, attainment of Social Studies objectives and the use of functional language in the teaching of Social Studies.
- H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significance relationship between students' academic performance and the use of functional language in the teaching and learning of Social Studies.

### **Methodology**

This study employed a quasi-experimental research design. The target population for the study comprises of all Social Studies teachers and students in Lagos State junior secondary schools most especially in Ojo Local Government Area. Two research instruments were used. Closed-

ended Questionnaire called “Social Studies Teachers’ Questionnaire” (SSTQ) was used. This instrument was employed because it is easy to construct and administer most especially when dealing with large population. The questionnaire had two (2) sections. Section A and Section B. Section A seeks information about the bio-data of the respondents, e. g sex, age, educational level, marital status and years of experience on the job. Section B contains 20 (twenty) statement items using four (4) Likert rating scale of SA= Strongly Agree, A= Agree, D= Disagree, SD= Strongly Disagree. An achievement test tagged Social Studies Achievement TEST SOSAT I and II was designed to generate information from the students’ performance. SOSAT I was the experimental group achievement test while SOSAT II stands as the control group. The instrument was subjected to scrutiny by experts in test construction as well as language educators for validation. To determine the reliability of the instrument tagged, SSTQ, SOSAT I and SOSAT II, a test Re-test procedure was employed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The result yielded 0.075 which indicates that the instruments were reliable. This study covered a period of two weeks. 20 Social Studies teachers and one hundred students were selected from ten Lagos State Junior Secondary Schools as population sample. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to analyse the achievement test while F-test was used for the teachers’ questionnaire.

## Results

### Test of Hypothesis One

**H<sub>01</sub>: That there is no significant relationship among teachers’ knowledge of core-concepts, academic qualification and the use of functional language in the teaching of social studies.**

**Table 1: Relationship among three Variable, Core-concept, Academic Qualification and Functional Language**

	SUM OF SQUARE	DF	MEAN SQUARE	F
Between groups	26.18	2	13.09	19.25
Within groups	38.8	57	0.68	19.25
<b>Total</b>	64.98	59		19.25

Calculated value= 19.25,  $F(2, 57) = 0.1925$ ,  $F(2, 57) = 19.25$ ;  $p > .05$ , Table value is 19.48 at \* 0.05, the calculated value of “f” is 19.48.

**Decision:** Since the calculated value of “f” is less than the table value at \*0.05. There is no significant relationship among the three variables: core-concepts, academic qualification and functional language. The null hypothesis is therefore not rejected.

### Testing of Hypothesis Two

**H<sub>02</sub>: That there is no significant relationship between students’ academic performance and the use of functional language in the teaching of Social Studies.**



**Table 2: Relationship between Students Academic Performance and the use of Functional Language**

VARIABLE	N	X(MAN)	R	P	REMARK
SOSAT I	2.00	3.46	0.524	0.05	Rejected
SOSAT II	2.00	2.76			

From the above result, calculated value of  $r$  is greater than the value at 0.05 level of significant. The calculated value of ( $r$ ) is 0.524 while the table value of 0.12 was obtained at 0.05 level of significant.

**Decision:** Therefore, the null hypothesis, which says that, there is no significant relationship between students' academic performance and use of functional language in the teaching and learning of social studies, is not accepted.

### Summary of the Findings

Data were collected and analysed on the use of functional language as panacea for the attainment of effective implementation of primary school social studies curriculum. Three variables were considered, these include; teachers' knowledge of core-concepts and academic qualifications as well as students' academic performance in Social Studies. From the data analysed, the following were the major findings:

- a. It reveals therefore that teachers' knowledge of core-concepts and academic qualifications has nothing to do with the use of functional language and vice-versa. The implication of this is that a teacher may acquire degrees without sound knowledge of appropriate diction in the effective delivery of the curriculum contents.
- b. In the same connection, knowledge of core-concept may be as a result of acquired degrees without ability to use functional language.
- c. Likewise the use of functional language may be as a result of factors that are not connected with knowledge of core-concepts and academic qualifications.
- d. That, to attain Social Studies objectives, there is the need for the teacher to have knowledge of liberal arts, language education and the acquisition of appropriate diction, which implies use of functional language.
- e. That, there is a symbiotic relationship between students' academic performance and the use of functional language in the teaching and learning of Social Studies. Students learn better when language of expression is appropriate, adequate, simple, concise and unambiguous. This finding has corroboration with similar research works in teaching competence, knowledge of inquiry method and Social Studies teachers' academic qualifications (Iyanmu, 2000; Mkpa, 1993 and Popoola, 2000).

The fact cannot be denied that language played an important role, as a cultural component for teaching, addressing and interpreting and a link between issues. Therefore, the need for Social Studies teachers' to acquire language proficiency has been equally adjudged to be vital (Lawal, 2004; Akinrolabu, 2008).

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations are presented:

1. Social Studies teachers should adopt core-concepts which embraces flexible terms peculiar to Social Studies for students to learn easily. That is, to avoid teaching concepts with ambiguous and unfamiliar identity.
2. Teachers should spend more time on making their teaching more learner-centred.
3. Teachers of Social Studies should equally take up courses in the language arts as a means of fortifying their language fluency and competence in their teaching process.
4. Textual materials in Social Studies should be such that it will be simplified for students or learners to study on their own.
5. There should also be a review in the Social Studies curriculum content to meet the nature and characteristics of every learner irrespective of their mental ability (Akinrolabu, 2008).

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