

# Challenges Affecting the Teaching and Learning of Social Studies in the Colleges of Education in Ghana

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study was to examine the challenges affecting the teaching and learning of Social Studies in the Colleges of Education in the Ashanti Region. Qualitatively, the study adopted a case study research design. The population of the study comprised fifteen (15) Social Studies teachers in the Ashanti region of Ghana. A purposive sampling technique was used to select the colleges and Social Studies teachers. The main instrument for data collection was an unstructured open-ended interview guide. Four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba in 1985 used to measure the trustworthiness of data collected are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Data obtained from the study were subjected to thematic analysis using themes developed from the data collected based on the research question. The findings of this study indicate that adequate textbooks, availability of teaching and learning materials such as projectors, the ability of tutors to engage in research, and the ability to vary teaching techniques are some factors that affect the teaching and learning of Social Studies in Colleges of Education. Students can remember a greater percentage of what was taught when techniques used by teachers are in their interest. It is recommended that T-TEL and Universities to which Colleges of Education are affiliated should continue to provide seminars and sessions to tutors in areas of material, resource development and research. This will continue to ensure that tutors are competent in their field of specialization. It is also recommended that the government should conduct a nationwide programme evaluation exercise on Social Studies to identify the loopholes needed to ensure the effectiveness of the subject.

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## 1. Introduction

Social Studies is an integrated discipline which is full of concepts which require a resourceful teacher to handle it [1]. This posits that “the effectiveness of every concept taught in the classroom depends solely on formative assessment, whereby both teachers and learners receive feedback during the learning interactions” [2]. A study on Teacher-Trainees’ Varying Curriculum Conceptions of Social Studies in the Colleges of Education (CoE) in Ghana, published *American Journal of Social Science Research* pointed out that: “Students taught not to understand Social Studies as an attitudinal building or problem-oriented subject but over emphasised knowledge component of the subject may pass through the academic system without acquiring worthwhile skills, values and attitudes that will enable them to solve their problems and that of society. The ramification of this ineffectiveness of some Social Studies teachers may result in moral decadence among our Ghanaian youth” [3]. This implies that “the concepts in Social Studies as a discipline can effectively be taught by teachers who possess the requisite qualification in Social Studies but not any teacher from different academic discipline [1]. This indicates that Pedagogical training is a strong predictor of teachers’ conception of Social Studies curriculum implementation in Ghanaian schools. The import of this assertion was that critical thinking is the most important skill for problem-solving, inquiry and discovery in Social Studies.

Teachers lacking the needed knowledge and teaching skills to impart Social Studies as a problem/issue-oriented subject need to be looked at [4]. There is therefore the need to assess the challenges affecting the teaching and learning of Social Studies in the Colleges of Education in the Ashanti Region. The study was guided by this research question - What are the challenges affecting the teaching and learning of Social Studies in the Colleges of Education in the Ashanti Region?

### ***1.1. Challenges Affecting Teaching and Learning of Social Studies***

The past years have witnessed several studies that have attempted to understand why students either like or dislike Social Studies. These studies have tried to identify and measure students' attitudes about Social Studies and predict what influences their performance relative to this area of the school curriculum [5, 6]. Studies revealed that teachers not showing interest in teaching controversial issues, teachers' inability to give needed assistance to students, teachers' inability to use different teaching techniques in Social Studies classes, inadequate teaching and learning materials and the inability of Social Studies teachers to employ resource persons in times of difficulty, are some of the critical factors affecting students' attitudes toward the learning of Social Studies [7, 8].

#### **1.1.1. The problem of using unqualified, inexperienced and out-of-field teachers teaching Social Studies. (Competence of teachers)**

The phenomenon of out-of-field teaching where teachers are placed in teaching positions in which they have to teach subjects or year-levels outside their field of qualification or expertise appears in public schools as well as independent schools. This happens either because of a managerial decision by the principal and the school management team or because of governmental recruitment and placement procedures [1, 9]. In a complex teaching situation, such as the out-of-field phenomenon, teachers adapt by developing certain teaching characteristics that may be acceptable to their superiors or leaders to survive, but they often become uncertain followers, rather than motivated leaders and creative developers of extended curricula. Teachers can adapt and develop the skills they need, but often at great cost to them and their students [8, 9-14]. The reality in the field is that each school community has its own needs; to meet them; school leaders must prioritise needs and fill teaching positions accordingly [9]. A writer brings forward an argument that leaders' understanding of the implications of taking the option to assign unsuitably qualified teachers in certain positions has a significant influence on teachers' out-of-field experience, and what it means for effective learning [15].

A writer observed that about a fifth of Social Studies teachers are without at least a minor in any of the social sciences, public affairs, Social Studies education, or history. He remarked that high levels of out-of-field assignments could also negatively affect the learning environment for all students in schools, not just for those students unlucky enough to be taught by out-of-field teachers. The assignment of teachers to teach fields in which they have no training could change the allocation of their preparation time across all of their courses—decreasing the amount of time they spend preparing for their other courses to prepare for the one(s) for which they have no background. There are, moreover, consequences for teachers to be considered. Having to cope with out-of-field assignments comes on top of an already burdensome teaching load for most public secondary teachers who are assigned an average of 128 students and five classes per day [10]. What is the impact on teachers' sense of efficacy of having to teach courses for which they have little formal background preparation? [15, 16].

Writers lamented one can easily imagine the limitations imposed by a lack of subject background on a teacher's ability to teach critical thinking and to engage the student's interest in the subject - the kinds of learning probably not well captured by standardized examinations [10, 17-19]. As out-of-field teaching can result in poor-quality teaching practices and inequity of teacher resources in education, a diagnostic understanding of how

the out-of-field phenomenon influences effective school leadership and management is essential. Due to the difficulty in obtaining qualified teachers, appointments were at times made knowing full well that the appointment is not the ideal appointment. Today, this remains one of the most vital matters that need to be addressed; teachers being out-of-field in not understanding the culture of the learners they are teaching. Some educators were and are very successful in adapting and using the learners' cultural background to help them excel in their specific subject, but there are teachers that, due to not understanding the cultural background of learners, are unable to motivate these learners to excel in their subjects [10, 20].

All these problems mentioned add an earlier remark that "there was lack of competent teachers to teach the subject effectively. Teachers were not trained in the philosophy, methodology, purpose and objectives as well as the techniques of teaching Social Studies" [1, 8, 21]. As a result, teachers teaching Social Studies at the time only paid lip services to the subject while they concentrated on teaching their traditional subjects of History, Geography, and Government, to mention but a few [8, 21]. The concept of "professional competence" is defined as the interactive form of understanding, prowess, attitudinal variables and motivational variables for implementing a specific task or work [22]. Professional competence is the habitual and judicious use of the communication, knowledge, technical skills, clinical, emotions, value and reflection in daily practice for the benefit of the individual reasoning and community being served". Based on such definition, professional competence is not inborn but can be accumulated via studying [1, 13, 23].

In the teaching field, many studies share the view of teachers' professional competence as the integration of knowledge and understanding, skills, and abilities, teachers' beliefs and moral values [1, 24]—a model of professional competence with two key components of profession-specific knowledge and affective-motivational characteristics. The professional knowledge comprises general pedagogical knowledge, content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge [1, 25]. The elements relating to emotional motivational characteristics are motivation, self-regulation, professional beliefs about teaching and learning and the subject content [1, 21].

The quality of education is always a concern to society due to the contribution of education to the country's development. Education supplies a vast number of high-skilled labour forces and shapes the ethics of workers. In the education and training system, teachers play a key role. With time, teachers are not only the providers of knowledge but also contribute to the student's comprehensive development in intelligence, personality, and social level. The development of teachers' professional competence is an important strategy to improve educational quality [1, 26, 27]. Writers indicate that a thorough understanding of factors influencing professional competence is the first essential step to this strategy [1, 28]. To get the optimal goal of learning requires teachers who are competent in managing learning. It is the professionalism of educators (teachers), and responsibility as learning planners when they are competent [1, 29]. Education is considered as the construction of knowledge as well as competency, and potential development, it is transformed drastically. Besides, students are expected to be able to learn without the limitation of time and place. Another important issue in education is to provide opportunities for students to think while they are solving problems, analyzing, and synthesis their knowledge at every level of their studies [26-28]. Teachers need to manage effective teaching and learning processes so that students know how to learn and utilize their knowledge appropriately in their daily lives and live in a society with happiness. Therefore, teachers need to develop their competencies through the educational transformation in practice as well as professional activities effectively [1, 30, 31].

The competency of an individual that involves his/her work can be detected through the work behaviour and that will be a success indicator for the organization rather than his/her educational level or intelligence. As a result, the present human resource development should emphasize competency development. A successful transformational leader

should develop teachers' competency so that teachers would change their working style. The main factor that affects the quality of instructional management include the good relationships between teachers and students as well as learning climate management [32]. In addition, teachers' work morale was able to motivate them to provide instructional management [33]. In this line of reasoning, teachers' competencies are essential to improve the quality of the students. The core curriculum of basic education in Ghana recognized the importance of attitudes as espoused in the Social Studies syllabus. Therefore, attitude development is a major concern in students' learning process. Students' learning process encompassed the transmission of knowledge, skill, attitude, and value systems to themselves and others. All these activities are expected to occur through teachers' instructional competency. Therefore, attitudes become a necessity for students to participate in public spheres, thus living happily in society.

A writer examined the status of Social Studies in Teacher Training Colleges in Ghana (now Colleges of Education) and found out that, the subject was ranked in the lower third, just above Physical Education and Home Economics [34]. The writer further noted that "the College Principals ascribed the situation to lack of competent teachers" [34]. The need for well-trained teachers to teach Social Studies has been emphasized by Social Studies educators that, Social Studies more than any other subject requires well-trained teachers [21, 35-38]. Research with pre-service teachers revealed that two-thirds of them scored below the mid-point on an instrument that assessed teachers' knowledge about concepts in Social Studies education, while classroom observational study revealed "a paucity of teaching skills with which to support... Social Studies education goals" [39, 40].

#### **1.1.2. Lack of meaning of concepts**

Social Studies teachers often present isolated facts with no regard to any context that might give meaning to concepts. Speculating on the reasons for such lacklustre teaching of concepts, Newman (1980) argues that bona fide discussion is usually suppressed by some teachers with the belief that the purpose of teaching is to transmit fixed knowledge to students. This is unfortunate, because, memorizing a lot of facts as isolated bits of information does not generate the meaning of concepts. Student teachers who are taught Social Studies by rote are rather like parrots that have been taught to recite without understanding conceptual issues [2, 41, 42].

#### **1.1.3. Lack of training in process skills**

This has been found that teachers do not, for the most part, provide training or practice in critical thinking, problem-solving, decision making or other process skills [1, 30, 42]. The view that teachers should devote attention and time to teaching students how to think about concepts is popular among many educators today [44]. These writers, for instance, stress that learners who leave school with highly developed thinking skills have powerful intellectual skills they can apply to develop and understand other concepts in new situations.

#### **1.1.4. Avoidance of controversial issues**

Teaching with a range of strategies leads to a higher likelihood of student involvement and engagement in higher-order thinking tasks such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. These critical-thinking activities can inspire students to engage and self-reflect, producing a more metacognitive process [35, 45]. These higher-order tasks help increase political knowledge and a sense of citizenship [46, 47]. Students learn how to construct opinions and persuade others so that they are better prepared for society. However, it is the teacher who defines and determines the value and effectiveness of these instructional methods and who decides to implement these teaching strategies [19, 48]. The goal for many Social Studies educators is to develop students into effective citizens who are reflective and critical thinkers [47, 49]. The National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) issued

the following position statement “A primary goal of public education is to prepare students to be engaged as effective citizens” [49]. To achieve this goal, teachers must teach Social Studies without avoiding controversial issues [21, 49]. Teaching controversial issues is an effective strategy endorsed by the NCSS [49]. NCSS released its revised position on teaching controversial issues, stating, “Controversial issues must be studied in the classroom without the assumption that they are settled in advance or there is only one right answer in matters of dispute. The Social Studies teacher must approach such issues in a spirit of critical inquiry exposing the students to a variety of ideas, even if they are different from their own” Furthermore, the NCSS identified four skills and attitudes that the study of controversial issues should help develop:

- The ability to study relevant social problems of the past or present and make informed decisions or conclusions;
- The ability to use critical reasoning and evidence-based evaluation in the study and analysis of significant issues and ideas; this includes the development of skills of critical analysis and evaluation in considering ideas, opinions, information, and sources of information;
- The recognition that differing viewpoints are valuable and normal as a part of social discourse; and;
- The recognition that reasonable compromise is often an important part of the democratic decision-making process [49].

Nonetheless, many Social Studies teachers neglect to teach controversial issues through discussion and interaction because of school and district policy, the attendant lack of classroom control, or discomfort with students openly discussing and debating the issues at hand. Many teachers consider teaching controversial issues a “no win” situation: Once the controversial issues reflect reality, the discussions can be counterproductive for students because of teachers’ inexperience or inability to harness the emotional contexts or dilemmas the students are trying to rationalize [43]. Studies suggest that “students who learn how to construct their knowledge are better prepared to right wrong in society” [50, 51]. In addition, a writer believes that teaching with discussions and allowing students to provide feedback helps them improve their ability to think critically [12, 28, 52].

Some educators believe that certain issues are best addressed privately — at home, for example, and that Social Studies should focus on objective facts. Others argue that public controversy is characteristic of a healthy democracy and that working with others to address multiple perspectives is a skill that students need to develop in a classroom context [47, 53]. All Social Studies teachers must inevitably deal with controversial issues, ranging from basic ideas of fairness and equality in a democracy, to immigration, to the distribution of world resources. Controversial issues require students to conduct thorough research, master concepts on both sides of an issue, and develop a perspective of their own.

The most difficult issues often have a profound impact on students, and class discussions about these issues can leave teachers feeling like referees. However, in a democracy, students must learn how to listen to opposing viewpoints, and the teacher’s role must be to create an open forum that allows opposing viewpoints to be fully expressed. The challenge for all teachers is finding the fine line between engaging students’ interests and maintaining a sense of objectivity that lets students master the material and develop their perspectives. A writer opined that through discussion, students increase their awareness of social, political, and environmental issues [54]. Encouraging students to discuss controversial issues allows them to be actively engaged in the curriculum and allows the issues to become more meaningful and relevant to the students’ everyday lives [16, 55]. Furthermore, discussing controversial issues also helps students develop critical decision-making skills, which are considered the heart of Social Studies education [2, 36, 56].

Many pre-service teachers are uncomfortable teaching controversial issues, such as sexual orientation, sexual harassment, and religious issues [57]. In addition, another



writer observed eighth- and tenth-grade Social Studies classes and found an almost complete absence of opportunities for students to discuss and analyze controversial social issues [58]. Many teachers instead use lecture-based instruction, rote memorization, and the textbook day after day, ignoring the opportunity to use a variety of teaching techniques [54]. Either out of fear or complaints (e.g. from parents) or out of personal preference, most Social Studies teachers are unwilling to take up in the classroom the controversies that arise in a society that must be addressed in Social Studies lessons [15, 59]. A study indicated that teacher response concerning pedagogy mirrored the above concern, with a significant percentage unsure of their ability to effectively teach controversial issues. Concerns surfaced over the ability of textbooks to cover or assist in teaching this subject. Overall, it appears that teachers understood the importance of controversial issues in Social Studies but were concerned about limitations, their teaching effectiveness, student behaviour, and consequences from the community. Controversial issues are important to teach, but pragmatically, problems exist in teaching them effectively and with minimal disturbances. Thus, the teaching of controversial issues is an integral part of the teaching and learning of Social Studies concepts and no effective teacher should compromise this on the altar of fear or intimidation, in so far as such controversies are not personalized [60].

#### **1.1.5. Limited shallow textbook content**

Most Social Studies texts are restricted in content, superficial in the treatment of concepts, and present facts out of their contexts [61]). In Ghana, most Social Studies textbooks have been written by people with superficial knowledge of the subject, and hence sub-standard, a situation which seriously undermines the effective teaching and learning of Social Studies concepts. The limited subject matter and uninspired treatment in Social Studies textbooks might not matter so much if Social Studies teachers use a rich array of other instructional resources [62]. A study revealed that the slow integration of ICT is among the factors that affect the teaching and learning of Social Studies [63]. They maintained that the integration of ICTs to support the learning environment in teaching is still in its early stages and chalkboards in the teaching are still dominant. Modern media such as computers are rarely used [63]. This means that Social Studies teachers are not adapting to current instructional practices when in fact, Social Studies teachers are the ones who should know well about adapting to changing situations. Consequently, tutors and policymakers are requested to view ICTs as beneficial tools that can make the teaching and learning of Social Studies

## **2. Materials and Methods**

Qualitatively, the study adopted a case study research design. The population of the study comprised fifteen (15) Social Studies teachers in the Ashanti region of Ghana. A purposive sampling technique was used to select the colleges and Social Studies teachers. These Colleges were purposely sampled because some Colleges do not offer Social Studies as a programme. Also, it was appropriate to adopt the purposive sampling technique as it allowed for the involvement of those with the specific required rich information. The main instrument for data collection was an unstructured open-ended interview guide. Open-ended interview questions were used because a research interview seeks to collect data at both a factual and meaningful level. The researcher traced and contacted the respondents for the interview in their various Colleges. The interviews were then transcribed and grouped according to the emerging themes about the purpose of the study. To ensure that the data collected remained trustworthy during and after collection, the researcher discussed the interview guide with some lectures in social studies from the University of Education, Winneba and the University of Cape Coast before it was administered. Four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba in 1985 used to measure the trust-

worthiness of data collected are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Data obtained from the study were subjected to thematic analysis using themes developed from the data collected based on the research question.

### **3. Findings and Discussion on the Challenges Affecting the Teaching and Learning of Social Studies in the Colleges of Education in the Ashanti Region**

This section presents findings and discussion on the research question - What are the challenges affecting the teaching and learning of Social Studies in the Colleges of Education in the Ashanti Region? This objective was specifically focused on the college tutors in the Ashanti Region. Data was obtained by the use of an interview and analysed using thematic analysis. The following thematic areas emerged after the interview with the respondents. Below are the areas:

#### **3.1. Inadequate teaching and learning materials**

The majority of the respondents said that teaching and learning resources were not enough to facilitate the teaching and learning of Social Studies. According to most of the respondents, teaching and learning resources are a great way to sustain students' interest in Social Studies. Once there are enough teaching and learning resources students can remember a greater percentage of what was taught. Below are some views of respondents on the issue of inadequate teaching and learning resources:

##### ***Respondent I***

*"Teaching without TLMs is like a soup without salt. When TLMs are incorporated in the teaching process, it sustains students' interest and makes them develop appropriate attitudes toward the subject".*

##### ***Respondent II***

*"When you teach without teaching and learning resources, you don't expect learners to understand up to your expectation. You can only do so when you employ resources. But the fact is that some resources are not available for us to use".*

##### ***Respondent III***

*"We have good whiteboards for teaching and learning to take place but sometimes you need some graphical representations to teach. You also need to use a projector to project some videos and pictures, which we lack. It is not that they are not available. It is just that they are inadequate".*

Teaching and learning resources aid teaching and learning to be more effective and easier. Children learn by doing and observing and this calls for the use of real-life situations in the Social Studies classroom [64]. This brings into sharp focus the use of multimedia resources in Social Studies education. The idea is that instructional materials are effective mechanisms for helping students to build clear and accurate concepts. In addition, materials are capable of directing students' interest and promoting their active participation in the teaching and learning process. Specifically, audio-visual resources are capable of widening students' horizons and range of experiences when judiciously utilized. Also, these resources reduce verbalism, which is characterized by rote learning and promotes retentive learning [34].

#### **3.2. Time allocation**

Time allocation emerged during the interview as one of the factors that affect the teaching and learning of Social Studies. Some of the respondents indicated that the time meant for teaching was not enough to achieve the stated objective. This is reflected in the words of some respondents below:

***Respondent A***

*"I think that the time allocated to Social Studies periods at the Colleges should be increased a little bit. That way, I think would help to achieve meaningful learning. Sometimes, learning becomes interesting but before you realize time up".*

A previous study supports the findings that "instructional time allows for understanding, prediction, and control, thus making it a concept worthy of a great deal more attention than it is usually given in education and educational research." Berliner explains the complexity of instructional time by differentiating among allocated time, engaged time, time on task, academic learning time, transition time, and waiting time [65]. A similar study indicated that time on task is one important variable, but student engaged time, distribution of time across activities, interactive instruction, and student achievement levels also influence overall achievement gains [67].

### ***3.3. Ability of tutors to use different teaching techniques***

The result of the study revealed that the use of different teaching techniques in the course of teaching positively affects the teaching and learning of Social Studies in the Colleges of Education in the Ashanti Region. It was shown that tutors use different techniques such as discussion, role play, think-pair-share and many others, to vary their teaching. Here is what a respondent said:

***Respondent K:***

*"For me, I do vary my teaching techniques in the course of teaching a lesson. I have seen some of my colleagues also doing that. This is what I can say, is a factor that positively affects teaching and learning in this college".*

It is extremely important to use different teaching methods and techniques together, because, some methods or techniques can cover the other methods' or techniques' shortcomings and make teaching enriched and more effective [68]. The technique of teaching is a teaching strategy used to achieve the expected goals [51, 69]. By utilizing accurate techniques, the teacher will achieve the goal of teaching smoothly. When the goals are formulated for students to have certain skills, techniques must be adapted in a way to achieve these goals. Thus, teachers should use techniques that can support teaching and learning activities, so they can be used as an effective tool to achieve the goal of teaching.

### ***3.4. Inadequate textbooks***

Availability of Textbooks emerged as another factor affecting the teaching and learning of Social Studies at the Colleges. The majority of respondent tutors indicated that "every course has a course pack which entails what it is to be taught but textbooks are not adequate". This is reflected in the words of a respondent below:

***Respondent D:***

*"Everybody knows the relevance of textbooks in teaching and learning. For me, I do a lot of research before going to the classroom. My concern is about the students. Textbooks must be available for them to aid in their readings. This also helps us,*



*because once they read what is available, it makes teaching easier and learning progresses faster”.*

Many researchers argue that the availability of textbooks appears to be the most consistent factor in predicting teacher effectiveness towards teaching in primary schools. Studies in different countries show a correlation between textbooks and educational achievement. In Uganda, a strong correlation was found between textbook availability in the classroom and students’ examination performance, regardless of students’ socio-economic status. Other writers propound that, children without textbooks achieved significantly lower test scores than those who had textbooks [70].

This high correlation between textbooks and achievement shows is not the only effect on individual students, but also the effect how a teacher has when using textbooks when few or no students have textbooks, the teacher has to use the textbooks as a guide and rely on the blackboard or oral dictation and students have to copy materials into their notebooks. This wastes the time of both teacher and student and consequently, students fail even if they have qualified and enough instructed materials. Teachers can vary teaching techniques if there are adequate textbooks. The result also shows that there are issues with textbooks having shallow limited contents.

This was revealed in the words of a respondent below:

***Respondent E:***

*“Some textbooks are shallow in content. In other words, what I am saying is that the way some Social Studies topics are treated in some books is not encouraging. The way issues treated are is not as deep as expected. It is as if, the authors do not have enough knowledge about what they were writing”.*

This present result is in line with the writings of other writers that, in Ghana, most Social Studies textbooks have been written by people with superficial knowledge of the subject, and hence sub-standard, a situation which seriously undermines the effective teaching and learning of Social Studies concepts [8, 71]. Moreover, it indicated that lack of exposure to the real world, lack of teaching and learning materials in teaching Social Studies, and inadequate instructional time on the school timetable for teaching Social Studies affect teaching and learning [7, 36].

#### **4. Conclusion and Recommendation**

The findings of this study indicate that adequate textbooks, availability of teaching and learning materials such as projectors, the ability of tutors to engage in research, and the ability to vary techniques of teaching are some factors that affect the teaching and learning of Social Studies in Colleges of Education. Students can remember a greater percentage of what was taught when techniques used by teachers are in their interest. It is recommended that T-TEL and Universities to which Colleges of Education are affiliated should continue to provide seminars and sessions to tutors in areas of material, resource development and research. This will continue to ensure that tutors are competent in their field of specialization. It is also recommended that the government should conduct a nationwide programme evaluation exercise on Social Studies to identify the loopholes needed to ensure the effectiveness of the subject.

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