

Influence of Learner Characteristics on Senior School Students' Preference for Learning Social Studies in Osun State, Nigeria

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Abstract. The Nigerian Senior Secondary School Curriculum approved for implementation since 1995 remain unimplemented even after the National Policy on Education recognized it as an elective senior school subject since 1998. This paper examined the influence of learner characteristics on Students' preference for learning Senior School Social Studies (SSSS) in Osun State, Nigeria. The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. A sample of 360 senior secondary schools students selected by stratified random sampling technique from 18 secondary schools in the three Senatorial District of Osun State participated in the study. One researcher-designed opinionnaire titled 'Senior School Students' Preference for Social Studies' (SPEFS) was used for data collection after validation and reliability test ($r = 0.65$). The data generated was analyzed using percentage and chi-square (χ^2) statistics to answer two research questions and test two null hypotheses respectively. The findings showed that: majority of students have preference for learning SSSS as an elective subject; female students showed significantly higher preference for learning SSSS than their male counterparts; and students' subject specialization or inclination does not influence their preference for learning social studies. Recommendations targeted at formalizing the implementation of Social Studies in the senior schools by the Federal and

State Ministries of Education were made. Based on the findings it was concluded that the exposure of students to Social Studies of the Junior Secondary Schools as a compulsory subject has not generated continuous interest in learning it beyond elective status. This implies that students' learning preferences for SSSS was different from their Junior Secondary School experience when they offered Social Studies compulsory as core curriculum component. It was therefore recommended that the Federal and State Ministries of Education in Nigeria should implement Social Studies as an active academic subject in Nigerian Senior Secondary schools curriculum and encourage other education stakeholders' to play complementary role in that direction.

Keywords: Social Studies; Learning; Learner Characteristics and Students' Preference

1. Introduction

The school curriculum is intricately cultured bound as it is developed to serve the peculiar needs of the society. Different academic subjects are included in the school curriculum at different levels of Nigeria as part of the excellent instrument for effecting national development (Federal Republic of Nigeria [FRN], 2014). Social Studies has been accorded pride of place

in the Nigerian school system at all levels since 1977 when the National Policy on Education (NPE) stipulated it as a core subjects at primary and junior secondary levels (FRN, 1977). The subject has also been an integrated component of the General Studies courses in higher education curriculum in Nigeria, especially in Nigerian universities, polytechnics and colleges of education.

The core curriculum status of social studies is for the purposes of a citizenship education, social science education and reflective inquiry (Okunloye, 2000; 2007; Angbing & Okunloye, 2013). However, Social Studies is yet to be offered in Nigerians senior secondary schools in spite of the Federal Ministry of Education's (1995) Senior Secondary School Social Studies Curriculum document, and NPE's recognition of social studies as an elective senior secondary school subject in 1998 (FRN, 1998). In the same vein, the publication of the National Examinations Councils (NECO) (2006 – 2009) syllabus of the subject for the Senior School Certificate Examinations (SSCE) since 2006 has not made the difference in making students to learn it as a senior secondary school subject up till 2017 senior school subject to date. Therefore, as at the beginning of the 2017/2018 senior secondary schools academic calendar in Nigeria, Social Studies is yet to be offered as an elective as approved by the NPE since 1998.

The choice of school subject is however not strictly a policy matter, especially when its placement in the school curriculum is accorded elective status. Several other factors determine students' choice and preference for learning school subject. These include learner characteristics (Antwi-Danso, 2008; Numale, 2007; & Bandura, 1997); parents'/guardians' directives or guidance's school career counseling, and peers influence (Graveir, 1986) among others. Therefore, it is pertinent to investigate why the learners for whom Senior School Social Studies (SSSS) was introduced are yet to offer the subject in Nigeria Senior Secondary Schools. This may be one fundamental step to ascertain whether the status quo of non-availability of SSSS in the Nigeria Senior Secondary School curriculum was caused by students – the primary target of the curriculum or otherwise.

2. Statement of the Problem

Social Studies has remained largely a curriculum on the drawing board at the senior secondary school level in Nigeria since 1977 when it was formally and nationally introduced in Nigeria educational system. Successive efforts at formalising its implementation by the National Educational Research and Development council (NERDC) Federal Ministry of Education and NECO through the production of curriculum document and examination syllabus respectively have not yielded the intend result till date. In curriculum development and implementation, the learners are the beginning and the end of all curriculum endeavours (Wheeler, 1967; Onwuka, 1996; Okunloye, 2014). This is particularly the case for the relatively new SSSS curriculum in Nigeria for which the NERDC and MOE produced a curriculum document since 1995. This was before the NPE (revised) approved its placement as an elective subject in the Nigerian senior school curriculum in 1998. The vacuum of unavailability of its examination syllabus was filled in 2006 when the foundation syllabus for the period 2006 – 2009 was produced and published by the NECO. Since the choice of all school subjects is in the final analysis a decision to be taken by the learner based on clearly identified guidelines in the school system, an investigation of the learners' preferences for SSSS may be one way of examining whether the learners are the inhibitive factor against the successful take-off of the subject in the senior school curriculum in Nigeria or otherwise. Therefore, this study examined the influence of learner characteristics on senior school students' preference for learning Social Studies in Osun State, Nigeria.

3. Purpose of the Study

The study examined the influence of learner characteristics on senior school students' preference for learning SSSS in Osun State, Nigeria. Specifically, it focus of the study includes:

Determined students' preference for SSSS, ascertained students' preference for SSSS as an elective or compulsory school subjects, examined the moderating inference of gender

and subject specialization on their preferences for learning SSSS.

4. Research Questions

Two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study, these include:

- What are the preferences of senior secondary school students for learning Social Studies as an academic subject?
- Which status (elective or core) of Social Sciences do students have learning preference(s) for in the senior secondary school curriculum?

5. Research Hypotheses

Ho₁: There is no significant difference in female and male students’ learning preferences for SSSS.

Ho₂: There is no significant difference between science and social science/humanities students’ learning preferences for SSSS.

6. Methodology

Descriptive survey design was employed for the study. A sample of 360 senior secondary (SS) students was drawn by stratified random

sampling technique from 18 senior secondary schools from the three senatorial districts of Osun State, Nigeria. One researcher-designed opinionnaire titled ‘Senior School Students’ Preferences for Social Studies (SPEFS) was used for data collection after validation by four social studies experts. 25 copies of SPEFS were administered twice in one senior secondary three class not involved in the main study with three weeks interval between the first and second administered to ascertain the reliability of the instrument. The use of Pearsons’ Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) statistics on the data generated from the pilot survey yielded $r = 0.65$. This magnitude of correlation was considered appropriate and adjudged a valid index of reliability of the instrument for this research in line with Cohen, (1988) and Koul, (2009) visitors on reliability index. The researcher-designed SPEFS was administered to 360 SS three students in 18 schools spread across the three Senatorial Districts of Osun State, Nigeria within five weeks by the researchers with the assistance of class teachers. All the completed copies of opinionnaires were collected and analyzed using percentage statistic to answer research questions 1 and 2 while research null hypotheses 1 and 2 were tested using Chi-square (X^2) statistics at 0.05 level of significance.

7. Results

Research Question 1: What are the preferences of senior secondary school students for learning social studies as an academic subject?

Results of senior students’ preference for SSSS are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Frequency, Distribution of Students Preferences for Learning SSSS

S/No	Opinionnaire Items	Agree	Disagree	Remarks
		No & %	No & %	No. & %
	I will offer social studies if available	188 (52.2%)	172 (47.8%)	Preferred
	I will offer SSSS if I am forced to	192 (53.3%)	168 (46.7%)	Preferred
	I will still offer SSSS even when it is a compulsory subject	214 (59.4%)	146 (40.6%)	Preferred
	I don’t want to offer SSSS even when it is a compulsory subject	156 (43.3%)	204 (56.7%)	Not Preferred

The percentage analysis of students’ preference for learning SSSS as shown in table 1 indicated that they preferred social studies as an academic subject because they have higher preference opinions (above 51%) on opinionnaire items 1 – 3, whereas a similar proportion of students agree not to offer it even when it is made compulsory (56.7%). Therefore, majority of the students had higher preference for learning SSSS.

Research Question 2: What status (elective or core) of Social Studies do students have learning preference(s) for in the senior secondary schools curriculum?

The status of SSSS preferred by the students is as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Frequency Distribution of the Status of SSSS Preferred by Students

S/No	Opinionnaire Items	No & %		Remarks
		No. & %	Agreement Preference	
	I will offer SSSS as an elective available	207 (57.5%)	153 (42.5%)	Preferred
	I will offer SSSS along with other electives	213 (59.2%)	147 (40.8%)	Preferred
	I will still offer other electives apart from SSSS	154 (42.8%)	206 (57.2%)	Not Preferred

The results of analysis of students’ learning preferences for SSSS in Table 2 show that social studies is Preferred by majority of students (above 51%) as an elective subject in the school curriculum. A minority of them however, show outright rejection of SSSS as an elective subject.

Hypotheses (H₀₁) Testing

H₀₁ There is no significant difference in female and male students’ preference for learning SSSS.

Result of H₀₁ testing is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of X² Analysis of Female and Male Students Preference for SSSS

Group of Students	Number of Respondents	df	X ² cal	X ² tab	Decision
Female	270	1	14.90	3.84	*Significant
Male	90				

*Significant at df 1/0.05

Given the calculated (X²cal) chi-square value that is greater than the tabulated X²tab (critical value) at df 1,0.05 level of significance, significant difference existed between the female and male students’ preferences for SSSS in favour of female students. Female students accordingly had significantly higher preference for learning SSSS than their male counterparts. Student gender, therefore, significantly influenced students’ preferences for learning SSSS.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference between science and social sciences/humanities students’ preferences for SSS.

The result of H₀₂ testing as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Summary of X²Analysis of Science and Social Sciences/Humanities Students’ Preference for SSSS.

Group of Students	Number of Respondents	df	X ² cal	X ² tab	Decision
Science	188	1	0.415	3.84	* not Significant
Social Sciences/Humanities	172				

*Not Significant at df 1/0.05

From the summary of result of X₂ analysis as shown in Table 4, the X² calculated value is less than the X² tabulated value at df 1, 0.05 level of significance. This is an indication that the obtained X² value lies in the acceptance region. Therefore, H₀₂ was not rejected. This means that students’ subject specialization orientation or

inclination does not significantly influence students’ preference for learning SSSS. From the foregoing results of data analysis the following are the summary of findings: Majority of students had positive preference to offer SSSS;

Majority of students' learning preference for SSSS as an its elective academic subject status and not as a core subject in the Senior Secondary School Curriculum;

Gender significantly influenced students' preferences for SSSS with more female students showing higher preference to learn it as an elective subject in the senior school curriculum; and

Students' subject specialization or inclination is not significant as a learner variable influencing students' preference for SSSS.

8. Discussion

The preference of senior school students to learn SSSS as an elective subject is in agreement with the status accorded the subject in the NPE (1998) as an elective academy subject among some social sciences, such as Economics, Geography, Government and Commerce. Their positive preferences for social studies also validates the affirmative result of primary needs analysis of the curriculum at the inception of its development. This is consistent with the established tradition in curriculum development (Oliva, 1997, & Okunloye, 2014).

The significant influence of gender in students' preferences for SSSS with females showing higher preferences than their male counterparts is at variance with the observed norm in the literature. According to Falaye (2006) gender differences are more glaring in physical sciences than in the non-sciences. However, the fact that academic career choices are complex decision making involving a complex mix of personality traits, individual's potentiality and future career or occupational aspiration as observed by Numale (2007) are pointers to the inconclusive nature of findings on the influences of gender on subject specialization.

The observed non-significant influence of student specialization orientation or inclination on students' preferences for SSSS may be a manifestation of the lingering formative experience of students in social studies at the basic school level. Social studies has been a compulsory subject at this level of education. They may accordingly think that their subject specialization inclinations or idiosyncrasies do not matter in the light of the requirement of

compulsory learning (Oliva, 1997) as dictated by its core curriculum status in Nigerian Basic Schools.

9. Conclusion

The study identified the readiness of the senior school students to offer social studies as stipulated in the NPE. However, the influence of learner characteristics on their preference for SSSS is somewhat inconclusive given the observed significant influence of gender as against the non-significant influence of subject specialization or inclination. The target audience or end-users readiness to learn the subject is a sufficient signal to move Social Studies curriculum at the senior secondary school from policy level to senior secondary school classroom situations.

10. Implications

The findings of this study revealed the need to implement the NPE provision on SSSS as an elective subject in as much as the students are willing to offer it. Therefore, there is the need for further curriculum implementations steps on Social Studies at the Nigerian senior secondary school level.

11. Recommendations

The following measures are recommended in order to start the implementation of social studies as a senior secondary school subject:

- The Federal Ministry of Education should direct the Federal government controlled senior schools and the state Ministry of Education to commence the placement of SSSS in the academic programmes of senior secondary schools as an elective academic subject;
- Awareness workshop; involving All Nigerian Conference of Principals of Secondary Schools and school counselors about the placement of SSSS in the curriculum should be organized at the Federal and state levels;
- Students in JSS who will be promoted to SS one should be encouraged to offer

- SSSS regardless of their subject specialization; and
- Although female students prefer SSSS more than boys, career counselors should guide students about gender neutrality or balance of social studies as academic subject;
 - Other complementary steps such as the production of textbooks, production of National Examination Council's equivalent of Social Studies syllabus for Senior School Certificate Examination by the West African Examination Council and preparation of teachers should be taken to ensure smooth take-off of senior school social studies in Nigeria.

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