
**BEYOND TEXTBOOKS: ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING
SKILLS FOR RESPONSIBLE CITIZENSHIP IN
SOCIAL STUDIES**

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Abstract

In today's rapidly evolving world, fostering ethical decision-making skills is essential for nurturing responsible citizenship, especially through Social Studies education. This study investigates the impact of traditional versus alternative instructional methods on secondary school students' ethical decision-making and civic engagement skills in Osun State, Nigeria. Using a descriptive research design, the study sampled 300 students and 100 teachers across three educational districts, selected through simple random sampling. The study aimed to answer one research question and test two hypotheses regarding the effectiveness of various teaching strategies on ethical decision-making. Data were collected using a self-designed questionnaire and analyzed with inferential statistics, including ANOVA and t-tests. Results indicated that alternative instructional methods, such as collaborative learning, case-based learning, and experiential activities, significantly improved students' ethical decision-making and civic engagement skills. In contrast, traditional lecture-based methods showed little impact on these skills. Additionally, teachers identified challenges in integrating

alternative methods into the current Social Studies curriculum, including limited resources and teacher preparedness. The study recommends that educational institutions prioritize professional development for teachers, equipping them with the skills to effectively implement alternative instructional strategies. Policy-makers should also consider revising the curriculum to accommodate more interactive and student-centred learning approaches to better prepare students for responsible citizenship.

Keywords: Textbooks, Ethical, Decision-making skills, Responsible citizenship, Social Studies.

Introduction

Ethical decision-making and responsible citizenship are critical competencies in the 21st century, where individuals are increasingly confronted with complex societal challenges. Social Studies, a foundational subject in school curricula, plays a pivotal role in cultivating these skills, preparing students to navigate ethical dilemmas and actively participate in civic life. However, traditional textbook-based instruction in Social Studies often falls short in equipping students with the necessary tools to meet these demands.

Awodola, (2024) opines that the goal of Social Studies is to develop informed, thoughtful, and engaged citizens capable of contributing positively to their communities and society at large. Ethical decision-making entails making choices that align with moral principles and consider the well-being of others. Responsible citizenship, meanwhile, encompasses a range of democratic values, including community engagement and social justice advocacy. Research has shown that engaging students in discussions about controversial issues and ethical dilemmas enhances critical thinking and moral reasoning (McAvoy & Hess, 2015). Furthermore, Social Studies education should prioritize the development of critical analysis and participatory skills needed for democratic engagement (Parker, 2018).

Despite these goals, traditional instructional approaches in Social

Studies, which often rely on textbook-based learning, tend to emphasize rote memorization at the expense of critical thinking and practical application. Such methods often present a simplified version of history and social issues, limiting students' engagement and their ability to grapple with real-world ethical dilemmas (Banks, 2024). This lack of engagement not only leads to superficial learning but also hinders students' enthusiasm for Social Studies (Levstik & Tyson, 2019).

In response to these challenges, educators have explored alternative instructional methods, such as case studies, role-playing, collaborative learning, and multimedia integration. These methods have been shown to foster deeper engagement, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills (Hattie, 2017). For example, case studies expose students to real-world scenarios that challenge them to apply ethical principles and consider multiple perspectives (Herreid & Schiller, 2016; Barton, 2019). Role-playing exercises foster empathy and a deeper understanding of ethical issues, while collaborative projects encourage teamwork and collective civic responsibility (Johnson & Johnson, 2019). Additionally, multimedia resources, such as videos and interactive platforms, make learning more engaging and relevant, helping student better grasp complex concepts (Mayer, 2019; Ryu & Sandoval, 2018).

Research has supported the effectiveness of these methods in enhancing students' ethical decision-making and civic engagement (Parker *et al*, 2019; Livingston & Kidder, 2020). Despite these promising outcomes, there is still a lack of comprehensive empirical studies comparing the impact of traditional textbook-based instruction with alternative methods. Moreover, questions remain about how these approaches can be successfully integrated into existing curricula across diverse educational settings (Barton & Levstik, 2019).

The traditional approach to teaching Social Studies, which relies heavily on textbook-based instruction, often fails to engage students deeply or equip them with the skills necessary to navigate the ethical and civic challenges of the modern world (McAvoy & Hess, 2015; Herried & Schiller, 2016). This method prioritizes rote memorization

of facts and presents a one-dimensional view of historical and social issues, limiting opportunities for students to engage in critical thinking, ethical reasoning, or active civic participation. Consequently, students may complete their education without the ability to make informed ethical decisions or effectively participate in democratic processes.

While alternative instructional methods – such as case studies, role-playing, collaborative projects, and multimedia resources – have shown promise in enhancing students’ ethical decision-making and understanding of civic responsibilities, there is limited comprehensive empirical research comparing these methods with traditional textbook-based approaches. Moreover, challenges surrounding the integration of alternative methods into existing curricula, along with questions about their scalability across diverse educational contexts, remain underexplored.

This gap in the literature underscores the need for further research to identify the most effective instructional strategies for teaching ethical decision-making and responsible citizenship within Social Studies. This study aims to address these gaps by empirically examining the effectiveness of alternative instructional methods in fostering ethical decision-making and civic engagement among secondary school students. This study ultimately investigated ethical decision-making skills for responsible citizenship in Social Studies. The specific objectives are to:

- i. determine the effectiveness of alternative methods of teaching on ethical decision making and civic responsibility skills among male and female students;
- ii. determine the effectiveness of alternative instructional methods, such as case studies, role-playing, and multimedia resources and traditional instructional methods in improving students’ ethical decision-making and civic responsibility skills in Social Studies; and
- iii. investigate the challenges of integrating alternative instructional methods into the existing Social Studies curriculum between resource-rich and resource-limited educational environments.

Research Question

What challenges are encountered in integrating alternative teaching methods into the existing Social Studies curriculum across different educational environments, and how do these challenges vary based on factors such as school resources and teacher preparedness?

Hypotheses

H₀1: There is no significant effectiveness of alternative instructional methods on ethical decision-making skills for effective citizenship between male and female students.

H₀2: There is no significant difference in the effectiveness of alternative instructional strategies and traditional methods in improving students' ethical decision-making and civic responsibility skills in Social Studies.

Methods

This study employed a non-experimental, descriptive-correlational research design using a cross-sectional survey to gather data on students' perceptions of various instructional methods in Social Studies. This approach is suitable for assessing the current state of students' ethical decision-making skills and civic engagement without manipulating any variables. The target population comprised all public secondary school Social Studies students and teachers across diverse educational settings in Osun State, including urban, suburban, and rural environments, to ensure a representative sample. A stratified random sampling technique was used to account for demographic variations and the diverse school environments. The sample included 300 students and 100 Social Studies teachers from the three educational districts of the state, ensuring adequate representation and statistical power to detect significant differences across the different instructional methods. The sample size was determined based on prior studies in similar contexts and power analysis to ensure the results were statistically reliable. Data were collected using two sets of self-designed structured questionnaires, which measured students' experiences with different instructional

methods and teachers' perceptions on the challenges teachers may face in integrating alternative teaching strategies into Social Studies curriculum. The questionnaires were designed based on a comprehensive review of the literature and expert input to ensure content validity. It included items covering two main constructs: ethical decision-making skills and civic engagement. These constructs were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree") to capture the level of agreement with various statements regarding instructional methods and their perceived impact and challenges. Reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.85, indicating strong internal consistency. The collected data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the differences in teachers' perceptions of the challenges encountered in integrating alternative instructional methods into the existing Social Studies curriculum between resource-limited and resource-rich educational environments?

Table 1: Challenges in Integrating Alternative Teaching Methods Based on Teacher Preparedness and Resources

Challenges	Proportion (%)	Number of Respondents
Teacher Preparedness	68%	68
Inadequate Resources	22%	22
Both Teacher Preparedness & Inadequate Resources	10%	10
No Major Challenge	0%	0

In answering research question three, the analysis in Table 2 reveal that Teacher preparedness is the main challenge for the majority (68%) of respondents. Inadequate Resources is a challenge for 38% of respondents, but fewer participants selected it as the primary challenge compared to teacher preparedness. A small

proportion (6%) considers both teacher preparedness and inadequate resources as equally significant factors contributing to the challenges of integrating alternative teaching methods. No respondents indicated that there were no challenges in integrating alternative methods.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis One: There is no significant effectiveness of alternative instructional methods on ethical decision-making skills for effective citizenship between male and female students.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and t-Test Results for Gender Difference in Ethical Decision-Making Skills

Group	M	SD	N	df
Females	4.16	1.0	150	280
Males	4.00	1.0	150	

A two-sample t-test was conducted to determine whether there were significant differences in the ethical decision-making skills of male and female students taught using alternative instructional methods. The results indicated no significant difference between females ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 1.0$) and males ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.0$) in terms of ethical decision-making skills, $t(298) = 1.38$, $p > .05$. The calculated t-value of 1.38 is smaller than the critical t-value, indicating that gender does not have a statistically significant effect on ethical decision-making skills in this study hence the hypothesis is hereby accepted.

Hypothesis 2. There is no significant effectiveness in the ethical decision making skills of students who are taught using alternative instructional methods and those taught with traditional textbook-based methods.

Table 3: Comparison of Test Scores between Textbook-Based and Alternative Instructional Methods

Group	N	M	SD	t-value	df	p-value
Textbook Based Methods	30	2.50	0.50	-17.35	298	0.50
Alternative Methods	270	4.20	0.60			

Table 3 shows that students taught with alternative methods ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 0.60$) scored significantly higher than those taught with textbook-based methods ($M = 2.50$, $SD = 0.50$). The t-test revealed a significant difference, $t(298) = -17.35$, $p = 0.50$ hence the hypothesis is hereby rejected.

Discussions

The findings from hypothesis one reveal that indicate that students taught using alternative instructional methods (like case studies, role-playing, multimedia resources) demonstrated significantly higher ethical decision-making skills compared to those taught using traditional textbook-based methods. The significant difference observed between the two groups supports the notion that active, student-centered learning methods – such as case studies, role-playing, and multimedia resources – are more effective in enhancing ethical decision-making skills compared to traditional, passive learning methods like textbook-based instruction. This finding aligns with recent literature that emphasizes the importance of interactive, experiential learning in developing critical thinking and ethical judgment (Olayanju & Olamide, 2021; Husain & Tan, 2023; Brown, 2023). Recent studies have demonstrated that students engaged in active learning tend to show a deeper understanding and application of ethical principles. For example, studies by Patel & Nwachukwu (2022) and Ajayi & Adebisi (2022) have reported that alternative instructional strategies, such as role-playing and case studies, help students engage more meaningfully with real-life ethical dilemmas, thus improving their ethical decision-making capabilities. In contrast,

traditional textbook-based methods often emphasize rote memorization and passive knowledge acquisition, which may not effectively promote ethical reasoning and critical thinking. This aligns with earlier research by Olaniran and Olaniyi (2020), which concluded that traditional methods fail to fully prepare students for real-world ethical challenges, as they lack the dynamic engagement required for critical reflection and ethical judgment. The findings suggest that educators seeking to improve students' ethical decision-making skills in Social Studies should consider integrating more interactive and experiential learning methods. These approaches are likely to foster deeper engagement with the content and improve students' ability to make informed ethical decisions (Levstic & Tyson, 2019; Johnson & Johnson, 2019).

The findings from hypothesis two indicate that there is no significant difference in ethical decision-making skills between male and female students taught using alternative instructional methods. This is consistent with the results from previous research that suggests gender may not be a key determinant in students' ethical reasoning abilities (Smith & Johnson, 2020). In this study, both male and female students exhibited similar outcomes, highlighting the possibility that alternative teaching methods may promote ethical decision-making skills uniformly across gender groups. Moreover, studies by Thompson *et al* (2021) and Walker (2019) support the notion that instructional methods, rather than gender, play a more prominent role in influencing ethical decision-making skills. These findings suggest that teaching strategies such as case studies, role-playing, and multimedia resources can be equally effective for both male and female students. This aligns with the principle of instructional equity, which posits that all students, regardless of gender, should have equal opportunities to develop their decision-making skills when exposed to innovative teaching methods (Jones & Davis, 2021; Dawodu, 2023).

Additionally, the consistent results across gender groups observed in this study may be attributed to the nature of the alternative instructional methods, which tend to be interactive, inclusive, and designed to engage students at multiple cognitive levels. Liu, (2022)

posits that these methods foster critical thinking and ethical reasoning, which are not necessarily influenced by gender but are instead dependent on the learner's engagement with the material and the learning environment. This suggests that alternative methods may transcend gender biases and effectively promote skills such as ethical decision-making, which are integral to Social Studies education.

Findings from the research question, revealed a significant disparity in teachers' perceptions of challenges based on the availability of resources. Specifically, 95% of respondents from resource-limited environments reported significant challenges in integrating alternative instructional methods, compared to only 5% from resource-rich environments. This aligns with existing literature, which underscores the critical role of resources in facilitating innovative teaching practices. For instance, Adebayo (2023), Adeyemi (2024), and Bassey (2023) highlighted that schools in resource-limited settings often lack infrastructure, teaching aids, and technological tools required to implement alternative instructional methods effectively. This resource deficit imposes substantial constraints on teachers, reducing their ability to adopt student-centered approaches like collaborative learning or multimedia integration.

Conversely, Smith and Johnson (2022) noted that resource-rich environments not only provide necessary materials but also foster a supportive culture through teacher training and professional development. Such a combination of cultural and material readiness significantly reduces barriers to integrating alternative instructional strategies, enabling teachers to focus more on pedagogical innovation rather than logistical challenges.

Another crucial factor identified in this study is teacher preparedness. While resources are vital, their impact is limited without competent and confident teachers capable of employing alternative methods effectively. Okeke and Musa (2022) emphasized that even in resource-rich environments, a lack of teacher preparedness can hinder the adoption of instructional innovations. This finding is echoed by Miller et al. (2022), who argued that both

resource availability and teacher capacity are critical for the successful implementation of alternative teaching strategies. Similarly, Okon and Adeola (2023) highlighted that addressing disparities in resource distribution and teacher training is essential for achieving equity in educational practices. Collectively, these insights point to the need for systemic reforms to eliminate barriers to the effective implementation of alternative instructional methods.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the critical role of alternative instructional methods in fostering ethical decision-making skills and enhancing civic engagement among secondary school students in Social Studies. The findings underscore the limitations of traditional teaching methods in developing these essential competencies, emphasizing the need for more innovative and interactive approaches. Furthermore, the challenges associated with integrating alternative teaching methods into existing curricula call for targeted efforts by educational institutions and policymakers to address these barriers. Prioritizing the professional development of teachers and equipping them with the necessary tools and confidence to adopt alternative instructional strategies will not only improve the quality of Social Studies education but also prepare students to become responsible citizens capable of making ethical decisions in a complex world. These efforts are vital for cultivating a generation of informed, engaged, and ethically grounded individuals.

Recommendations

The findings of this study revealed that students taught using alternative instructional methods achieved significantly higher mean scores in ethical decision-making skills, highlighting the effectiveness of these approaches across genders. However, teachers in resource-limited environments face significant challenges in implementing these methods due to inadequate resources, infrastructure, and teaching aids, unlike their counterparts in resource-rich environments. To address these disparities, it is essential for governments and stakeholders to provide funding, teaching aids, ICT tools, and

teacher training tailored to practical implementation. Additionally, partnerships with local communities and NGOs can bridge resource gaps, while resource-rich schools should serve as benchmarks for innovation. Continuous evaluation and feedback mechanisms must be institutionalized to ensure that instructional methods remain impactful and equitable.

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