

IMPROVING STUDENTS KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDES TO MULTICULTURAL CONCEPTS IN SOCIAL STUDIES THROUGH GROUP LEARNING: A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO NIGERIAN UNITY AND INTEGRATION

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Abstract

Knowledge and attitudes to multicultural education concepts in Social Studies are invaluable experiences of analyzing various cultures in today's interdependent world. They increase students' capacity for intellectual open-mindedness and global perspective about issues. Equity pedagogy exists when teachers modify their teaching strategies in ways that will facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse racial and cultural groups. In an attempt to meet the demands of multicultural learners, instructional strategies must be centered on multicultural education concepts taking into account the historical, cultural, social and economic characteristics of Nigeria as a nation. The conventional method is the common mode of instruction for schools, but more often than not criticized as not the most effective. Therefore, this call for the incorporation of other alternative approaches to teaching Social Studies such as the group learning strategies. A 30-item achievement test was administered on 126 junior secondary school students

randomly selected from two secondary schools in the south-west region of Nigeria. Data were analysed using analysis of Co-variance. The findings of this study revealed that group learning of the cooperative structure proved more effective than the conventional strategy in the teaching and learning of multicultural concepts in Social Studies. The study concluded that group learning strategy is a good and effective strategy that could be used to impact knowledge of multicultural issues and concepts in Social Studies.

Keywords: Group learning, Cooperative structure, Multicultural education, Social Studies, Unity and Integration

Introduction

One of the key challenges to Nigeria's unity and integration and the effective implementation of the lofty aims and objectives of the country's education is the multiethnic and multi-religious composition of the country. Nigerians are people with varied languages and ethnic identities with over 400 ethnic groups consisting of the Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, Yoruba and Kanuri as the largest among the ethnic groups (NPC, 2007). In virtually every school in the country, it is not uncommon to find students who are not only from different ethnic groups but also from a variety of racial composition, and this is increasing every day (Ajitoni, 2011; Ojebiyi & Salako, 2010). While it is expected that this diversity will be a source of strength, unity and integration for the people, it has created an imbalance of power among the various groups, the resultant effects of which are conflicts, crises, antagonism and prejudice, stereotype, discrimination, lack of equal opportunity and resistance (Ajitoni, 2011).

These are other emerging events in Nigeria and the other parts of world support the agreement among scholars that there is the need for learners to develop

faith, self-expression, self-confidence, ability, and the skill to learn about issues and problems relating to themselves, their immediate community, the remote societies as well as internal and international communities (Ajiboye, 2010). If this development of knowledge and understanding must happen and the much needed national unity and integration must be a reality in Nigeria, the Nigerian children would need a unique and a peculiar type of education that will enable them to participate effectively in life. They need the education that will direct and give them a free hand and opportunity to make enquiries about things within and outside their environment, investigate, discover, discuss, experiment and acquire experiences in order to make decisions on societal issues and problems, and be in a position to proffer solutions to such problems.

Social Studies has emerged to provide this needed type of education. Social Studies is primarily concerned with the study of people, their activities and relationships as they interact with their physical and socio-cultural environment. These relationships are found in three major areas: the individual relationship to self, the individual to their people, and the individual to the environment (Lee, 2006). Since its emergence as a curricula area in the early 1960s, Social Studies has expanded rapidly to become a core subject offered in Nigerian schools (Adeyemi, 2005; NPE, 2004). Consequently the subject has assumed an increasingly important role particularly in the first nine years of the country's education system (Echefu, 2008; Fabule, 2009). In order for Social Studies to perform its functions effectively, instructional strategies in the subject must be centered on multicultural concepts due to the multicultural nature of Nigeria (Agunbiade, 2007) and the many crises that plague the country. Among such crises are ethnic and religious crises, armed robbery, unstable political culture, corruption, and a host of others. The origin of these problems could be traced to

such factors as the colonial origin of the country, the pattern of migration to the urban areas, and the dependent status of Nigeria on the developed capitalist countries (Ajitoni, 2011). These crises in Nigeria have called to question the much needed national unity and integration. Hence, multicultural education concepts in Social Studies take into account the historical, cultural, social and economic characteristics of the nation because Nigerians are people with varied languages and ethnic identities. These include a variety of issues such as equity and justice, religion, ethnicity, cooperation and conflict, peace, racism, culture and identity, civic rights and responsibility, leadership, followership, citizenship to mention just a few (NERDC and UBEC, 2007). Such concepts could foster critical thinking in learners and development in any society (Bennet, 2007; Reed & Black, 2006).

It is significant to note that in virtually every school in many parts of Nigeria, students are found to belong to various ethnic groups and, as noticed by Ojebiyi and Salako (2010), this diversity is daily on the increase. Instructional environments and the ability of instructors to develop teaching strategies are, hereby germane for the transfer of knowledge, right attitude and development in the Nigerian schools and societies. Therefore, developing appropriate knowledge and right attitudes towards multicultural education. Concepts in Social Studies is essential for peaceful co-existence in the Nigerian. It has been postulated that with the right type of attitude and appropriate knowledge, students better understand the nature, complexity and development of the United States of America as well as societies in other nations throughout the world (Bennet, 2006; Garmon, 2004; Gay, 2004; Lee, 2006). The conventional method is the commonest strategy in most schools in Nigeria. It is a teaching strategy whereby an instructor is the central focus of information transfer. Typically an instructor will stand before a class and present information, notes are written on a board and students are expected to take

such notes while listening to the lecture. However, the method is not the most effective according to Lai (2002) because it focuses entirely on intellectual and ignores experiential learning.

Moreover, multicultural education requires much more than knowledge acquisition through teaching. It encompasses attitudes, skills and the essential practices for effective interaction in society Nigeria today, more than ever before, needs national unity and the integration of the various ethnic groups unto the mainstream of the Nigerian society. One of the general objectives of Social Studies Education in Nigeria is to develop a sympathetic appreciation of the diversity and interdependence of all members of the local and international community (Ogundare, 2009). This is a good basis for the inculcation of multicultural education concepts in Social Studies Curriculum in Nigeria. Thus, efforts should be made to ensure that these concepts are properly taught in social to bring about unity in diversity However, these efforts have been more theoretical than practical. There is the need to develop ways of getting positive results that will unite rather than divide the people in Nigeria. There is much evidence to show that there is a lack of teacher preparation in this value-laden, new and emerging content area of Social Studies Education (Ajitoni, 2011). This singular act has brought about the involvement in this study to find an alternative to the conventional or traditional teacher presence and talk-and-chalk practice of teaching multicultural concepts in the classroom.

The question of which method yields the most effective learning is one that has been debated extensively throughout the history of education in Nigeria. In an attempt to meet the demands of learners and avoid complaints about poor performances as a result of the practice of conventional lecture method which is what most teachers use in schools, the need for teachers to have a change of style

became imperative. Research indicated that the academic achievement of students are likely to improve when group learning strategies are used in instruction (Amosun, 2002; Aronson and Gonzalez, 1988). One of the reasons for using active learning methods such as group learning is that learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much by just sitting in the class listening to teachers, memorizing prepackaged assignments, and spitting out answers. They need to talk about what they are learning, Write about it, relate it to past experiences, and apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). Also, in studies reviewed by Yusuf (2004), one teaching strategy consistently results in both achievement and attitudinal gains, and this stagey is cooperative teaching strategy. Cooperative discussion group learning is an instructional strategy in which students work and discuss together in small, heterogeneous groups to complete a problem, project, or other instructional goals, while teachers act as guides or facilitators (Duplass, 2006; Lie, 2008; Williams, 2007). Effective teaching and learning could still be achieved through the use of an alternative pedagogy. By its very nature students are trained to become active learners because new perspectives are shared within groups as a result of the existing variety of background knowledge.

Cooperative discussion group learning and conventional teaching strategies

Groups of some kind have always been used for learning for some time and there has been a considerable growth in interest in different forms of group work in education and training over the years (Reynolds, 2004). Developing group methods for learning is a way or answering the wish of many teachers for education to mirror and reinforce the values of democratic society of which Nigeria claims to be part. As observed by Reynolds (2004), group learning could help a group of people make prior experience available for learning. Learners could generate fresh

material through experimental activities and could provide a forum for collective decision making about the content and direction of learning and development.

One of the more familiar group learning methods which is used in this study is the discussion groups. Discussion groups are the most familiar of all group activities (Reynolds, 2004 & Hill, 1997). Group discussion provides students with opportunities to acquire knowledge and insight through the face-to-face exchange of information, ideas and opinions (Davis, 1993). A good give-and- take discussion in a multicultural classroom can produce unmatched learning experiences as students articulate their ideas, respond to their classmates' points, and develop skills in evaluating the evidence for their own and others' positions. Discussions are useful for actively involving students in learning. Through discussion, students gain practice in thinking through problems and organizing concepts, formulating arguments and counterarguments, testing their ideas in a public setting, evaluating the evidence for their own and others' positions, and responding thoughtfully and critically to diverse points of view (Davis, 1993).

Three types of grouping are competitive, cooperative, and individualistic (Schunk, 2000). Competitive striations negatively link individuals' goals so that if Olu attains his goals, then the chances of others attaining their goals are lowered. In the cooperative situations, by contrast, individuals' goals are positively linked such that Olu can attain his goals when others attain theirs. Individualistic structures have no link between individuals' goals. Since our concern in this paper is Nigeria's unity and integration, the cooperative discussion grouping was considered for improving social relations in multicultural classrooms.

It is remarkable that notable scholars have worked on cooperative learning strategies to effectively teach Social Studies and related subjects (Adeyemi, 2002;

Amosun, 2002; Kolawole, 2007; Omosehin, 2003; Pandian, 2004; Parker, 2004; Samuel & John, 2004). The researchers have made useful contributions and generally agreed that the cooperative situations of group discussion strategy seems to be more useful than any other instructional strategy. However, most studies on cooperative structures learning of the group discussion did not research into the area of multiculturalism. A research into this area is germane because the diversity of people all over the world brings together students from many ethnicities and cultures in various classrooms (Ajitoni, 2011 & Banks, 2004). A teacher should create an educational environment that will ensure success for all students. To do this, it is essential to explore practices to facilitate learning among diverse group of learners. Therefore, this study examined effects of cooperative learning structure of group discussion strategy on junior secondary school students' knowledge and attitudes to multicultural concepts in Social Studies with a focus to bridge the gap between the classroom and teaching strategies and activities outside the classroom. Cooperative group discussion is a viable yet generally underutilized method of instruction in schools and the colleges (Paulsen and Faust, 2008). However, Paulsen and Faust (2008) noted that cooperative group learning gives students the opportunity for collaborative learning.

The modified conventional method is still the most frequently used method of instruction in schools today. The techniques involved in the method serve as the basis for other methods of training. Conventional method is a teaching strategy whereby an instructor is the central focus of information transfer. Typically, an instructor will stand before a class and present information for the students to learn. Sometimes, they will write on a board or use an overhead projector to provide visuals for students. Students are expected to take notes while listening to the lecture. One of its advantages is that it is possible to educate large number of

people at once, thereby lowering costs (Fabule, 2009). However, Grunwald and Hartman (2010) stated that the learning effectiveness of the modified conventional method has been questioned because of the lack of adequate interaction between the instructor and students. Usually very little exchange occurs between the instructor and the students airing a lecture but it continues as a means of reaching a large group at one time with an organized body of information. According to Chaplin (2009), its limitation is that it yields less deep knowledge compared to other teaching methods such as group learning.

Whichever method is employed in the teaching- learning process certain variables may impact on student performances. The age of the learner has been found to affect the learner's attitude, concept, and mental developments, personality integration, psychomotor abilities, and even teacher behaviour and effectiveness (Klausmeier & Goodwin, 2006). Similarly gender has been found to have effects on learners' perception of violence, changing values, aggression, dominance, risk taking, and performance in school, among others (Lindgren, 2003). However, research findings on these variables are conflicting and inconclusive. There is, therefore, a need to further determine their effects on students' knowledge and attitudes to multicultural issues and problems in Social Studies.

Problem of the Study

In spite of the various efforts made by past and present governments in Nigeria to build a strong, united and progressive society through the introduction of indigenous language policy, civic education, Social Studies education, to mention a few, there is still so much insecurity and indiscipline in the society. The school leaders and teachers who have been left to deal with the ever-present crises not

succeeded partly because of the ineffective pedagogical approaches they employed towards these issues and problems. It has, therefore become apparent that the conventional method which is currently the teaching approach in Nigerian schools is inappropriate and ineffective for achieving the high objectives of Social Studies and for integrating the various groups in the country. Another alternative approach would have to be sought. This study therefore, determined the effects of group learning strategy, with emphasis on the cooperative structure of the group learning, on junior secondary school students' knowledge of and attitudes to multicultural concepts in Social Studies. This was with a view to serving as a guide to Nigerian unity and integration.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were generated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H₀₁: There is no significant main effect of treatment on student's achievement in multicultural education concepts in Social Studies.

H₀₂: There is no significant main effect of gender on students' achievement in multicultural education concepts in Social Studies.

H₀₃: There is no significant main effect of age on student's achievement in multicultural education concepts in Social Studies.

H₀₄: There is no significant main effect of treatment, gender and age on students' achievement in multicultural education concepts in Social Studies.

Design

The study adopted a pretest, posttest, control group, quasi experimental design. The design is represented schematically as follows:

$O_1 \quad X_1 \quad O_3$ ---- Experimental Group 1

$O_2 \quad X_2 \quad O_4$ – Control Group

Where O_1 and O_2 are pre-test measures/observations of experimental group 1 and control respectively. O_3 and O_4 are the post-test measures/ observations of experimental group 1 and control respectively.

X_1 = (Cooperative Learning)

X_2 = (Conventional Method Control)

Research Procedure

The study was carried out among Junior Secondary School students Or Gateway Secondary School and Olumo High School both in Ogun state, Nigeria. Using the random sampling technique, a sample of 126 students was selected for the study. The age of the participants ranged between 13 and 18 years with a means of 14.84.

Instrumentation

The study employed the following standardized instrument: Achievement Test on Social Studies (ATSS) The test item consisted of thirty items which cut across Social Studies related issues. The test items were drawn from the Universal Basic Education Curriculum on Social Studies for Junior Secondary Schools designed by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. The average item difficulty level of the test as well as the reliability was determined using KR-20 formula. The reliability coefficient is 0.72.

Findings

H0₁: There is no significant main effect of treatment on student's achievement in multicultural education concepts in Social Studies.

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected						
Model	4367.589 ^a	8	545.949	52.571	.000	.782
Intercept	790.877	1	790.877	76.156	.000	.394
Pre- score	1329.036	1	1329.036	127.976	.000	.522
Treatment	803.645	1	803.645	77.385	.000	.398
Gender	7.037	1	7.037	.678	.412	.006
Age	36.595	1	36.595	3.524	.063	.029
Trtmnt*gender	2.848	1	2.848	.274	.601	.002
Trtmnt*age	33.676	1	33.676	3.243	.074	.027
Gender*age	6.682	1	6.682	.643	.424	.005
Trtmnt*gender*age	.983	1	.983	.095	.759	.001
Error	1215.046	117	10.385			
Total	65428.000	126				
Corrected Total	5582.635	125				

^a R-squared= .782(Adjusted R-squared = .767)

Findings in Table 1 shows that there is no significant main effect of treatment on students' achievement in the selected concepts $F_{(1,117)} = 77.39$; $p < 0.05$).

Table 2: Estimate Marginal M

Estimates

Dependent Variable: Post Score

Treatment	Mean	Std.Error
Exptal group (Cooperative group discussion)	24.964 ^a	.602
Control (Conventional)	17.651 ^a	.557

Table 2 shows that the experimental group had higher mean score (24.96) than the control group which was exposed to the conventional method (17.65). Table 2 shows the magnitude of preference of achievement above the group.

H0₂: There is no significant main effect of gender on Students' achievement in multicultural education concepts in Social Studies. Based on Table 1, there was no significant main effect of gender on students' achievement in the selected ($F_{(1,117)} = 0.678$; $p > 0.05$). Therefore, H0₂, is rejected (3.524; $p > 0.05$).

H0₃: There is no significant main effect of age on Students' achievement in multicultural education concepts in Social Studies. Table 1 equally shows that there was no main effect of age on achievement of students in the selected multicultural education concepts in Social Studies Therefore, H0₃ is rejected.

H0₄: There is no significant main effect of treatment, gender and age on students' achievement in multicultural education concepts in Social Studies. Table 1 revealed that there was no significant effect of treatment, gender and age on achievement (.095; $p > 0.05$).

Table 3: Treatment *gender* age Dependent Variable: Post score

Treatment	Gender Age	Means	Std. Error
Exptal group (cooperative discussion)	Male	Young (less than 16yrs)	24.668 ^a .601
		Old (16 and above)	25.510 ^a .1225
	Female	Young (less than 16yrs)	25.335 ^a .693
		Old (16 and above)	24.343 ^a 1.869
Control (conventional)	Male	Young (less than 16yrs)	19.476 ^a .667
		Old (16 and above)	16.920 ^a 1.441

	Female	Young (less than 16yrs)	18.804 ^a .623
		Old (16 and above)	15.405 ^a 1.272

^a Covariance appearing in the model are evaluated using the above values

Pre-score= 14.8492.

In line with Table 1, Table 3 also revealed that there was no significant effect of treatment, gender and age on achievement. Therefore HO, is rejected.

Discussion

The group processes in the classroom have become primary concerns of most educators. One of the reasons for these concerns in Nigeria is the increasing complexity of social conditions and the large concentrations of people of different ethnic groups and cultural backgrounds in cities and peri-urban centers. This large concentration of people of diverse ethnic groups which would have contributed to national unity and integration but instead, undermines the fabrics of unity in the society calls for a great emphasis on the importance of learning to work effectively in groups. Moreover, modern life, particularly in cities, places a premium on the ability to relate well with others, and future adults (toady's youths) will, in the words of Schmuck and Schmuck (1998), be compelled to deal with interpersonal tensions and conflict-or merely to avoid them but to handle them constructively and creativity- if some of the social problems of the world are to be solved.

As a result of societal changes during the past several years, schools in Nigeria and elsewhere, have an increased obligation to help students learn behavioural skills that will equip them to fill responsible and useful roles in society and to contribute maximally to the productivity of their groups. This means to us educators that, concurrent with the teaching of an academic curriculum, schools

should be concerned with the development of skills in interpersonal relationships in multicultural classrooms, with the adequacy of students' relationship to their classmates and teachers, as well as to themselves individually.

The classroom is not and should not be, a depersonalized setting; it abounds with emotion between teachers and students and between a student and his/her mates. It is primarily members of the peer group who respond most to a student's affective needs. A close friend can help a student overcome anxiety and loneliness in a large complex school. As the combination of teachers' responses to a student's personal needs and the peer group's interaction with him or her constitute the core of group processes in the classroom, teachers should employ teaching strategies that will bring about the realization of these.

Schmuck and Schmuck (1998) observed with emphasis that peers in group learning are especially influential in shaping the group processes in a classroom. They provide emotional support as each student attempts to break free of dependency on his/her family and other adult figures. The current study found that members of the learning groups directly influenced one another's information and attitudes toward success, some multicultural education concepts such as power, prestige, respect, cooperation, and ways of affiliating with others, irrespective of ethnic or religious background. As the students gave and took with one another in the learning groups, they learnt ways of relating to persons of all ages, religions and ethnic groups with some degree of empathy and reciprocity. These group members also helped shape some of their mates' own attitudes, values, aspirations, and social behaviours.

It was found also that while the groups were very important and effective, the classroom was made up of much more. The classroom turned out to be a

healthy environment and a meeting ground for the student groups taken collectively, the teacher, the individual students, and the academic curriculum. Teaching and learning became complementary acts that involved a host of interpersonal processes. The teacher's instructional style and the curriculum, the students feeling about themselves and their academic abilities, and the nature of the interpersonal relationships in the classroom were found to be major influences on the teaching- learning process (Johnson & Johnson, 1985; Cohen, 1994(a); 1994(b); Slavin, 1995).

It is worthy of note that the larger environments had some impact on the students' behaviour. Each member of this classroom social configuration brought to it a special, unique set of characteristics, and since the classroom was only one part of the life of each of its members, it was vulnerable to the influences of social forces surrounding it. As noticed by Schmuck and Schmuck (1998), the classroom group was directly and indirectly influenced by the total organization of the school building, the characteristics of the community in which the buildings lay, and the dynamics of the entire state in which the community was located.

Conclusion

The major goals of this study was to determine the effects of group learning strategy using the cooperative learning structure of the group learning strategy as an alternative to the conventional method of teaching and the conventional lecture method itself. Once again, the significant main effect of treatment on students' achievement has been shown to be fundamental. The phenomenon of large classes is fast becoming the vogue of educational institutions in Nigeria, if not in many countries in Africa. The large class syndrome has been attributed to the expansion in annual students' enrolment. At any rate, education as old as man has been

characterized with mass instruction and this is the peculiarity of large classes in various institutions. Hundreds of students often cluster in a small hall tending to pay attention to the teacher talking and chalking and vocationally scribbling on the chalkboard, while it is mostly assumed that, as the teacher with only a few of the students as a result of the gap between the teacher, the taught and the content. In a large class, where conventional method is typically the mode of instruction, meeting the needs of the variety of students through effective communication has, therefore, been found to be a challenge. In essence, there is the need to be conscious of the fact that the key to effective instruction and students learning is effective appropriate teaching method.

Recommendations

The ever-changing political and economic situations in Nigeria have seen people migrating largely from the rural to the urban and mildly from the urban to the rural areas. The effect of these is that there is continued emerging diversity in the society. Hence, a teaching technique which allows for group cooperative learning is preferred for harmonious coexistence in the classroom (Amosun, 2002).

Furthermore, valuing diversity in the class means learning about which the differences and similarities and finding ways to work which will lead to developing a culturally responsive curriculum and cross cultural understanding to help students build self-esteem and successful relationships. It is, therefore, imperative for teachers to acquire as much knowledge as possible about the world and its culture (Spring, 2009) In order to prepare students to be productive citizens in a global economy, teachers must have the mentality and tools to instill global perspectives in students (Gay, 2004).

Effective teaching and learning could still be achieved through the use of an alternative pedagogy to the traditional chalk and talk method. Consequently, focus should be shifted to the cooperative structure which is one of the group learning methods. By its very nature students are trained to become active learners because new perspectives are shared within groups as a result of the existing variety of background knowledge. The conventional method which is currently the teaching approach in many Nigerian schools is inappropriate and ineffective for achieving the high objectives of Social Studies. Therefore, there is need for teachers to have a change of style.

Group cooperative learning places students in heterogeneous groups usually consisting of four or five students and they work together on a common goal. As students collaborate and cooperate with one another in their groups, they develop cross-cultural understanding and develop stronger interpersonal friendships than they would by working alone (Johnson & Johnson, 1990; Snowman & Biehler, 2003). The learners become active in the learning situation. This view of learning is participatory and sharply contrasts to the conventional method in which learning is the passive transmission of information from one individual to another, a strategy that is commonly used in schools today

In this era of information technology, students can easily access many kinds of information in which they are interested. Work projects can be initiated at any point and readily extended to include other members of the class, Tarrant, Mackenzie and Hewitt (2006) argued that under such conditions children develop considerable appreciation of an interest in different viewpoints and their sympathies come into action with very little prompting.

Finally group cooperative learning is an instructional strategy that simultaneously addresses academic and social skill learning by students. It is a well-researched instructional strategy and has been reported to be highly successful in the classroom. Considering the fact that there is an ever increasing need for interdependence in all levels of our society, providing students with the tools to effectively work in a collaborative environment should be a priority. Hence, group cooperative learning strategy is one way of providing students with a well defined framework which to learn from each other.

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