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Improvisation of Instructional Materials in Teaching Social Studies in Junior Secondary Schools

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Abstract

This paper examined the improvisation of instructional materials for teaching social studies in junior secondary schools. The study considered social studies a core subject in the school curriculum taught from primary to junior secondary school level purported for citizenship education. Effective teaching and learning of social studies relies more on the utilization of instructional materials to make content vivid and interesting. However, literature highlighted inadequacy and non-utilization of instructional materials in teaching the subject, thus suggesting improvisation. This paper explored the concept of improvisation and benefits of improvisation in teaching and learning. Instructional materials improvised in the teaching of social studies were identified, and lastly problems hindering teachers of social studies from improvising instructional materials were discussed.

Keywords: Social studies, instructional materials, improvisation, teaching and learning, teachers.

Introduction

Utilization of instructional materials is crucial for enhancing teaching and learning at all levels of education. Effective utilization of instructional materials requires teacher's resourcefulness in both design, development and selection of instructional materials. Social studies teachers use instructional materials to ignite interactive gestures within the learning environment to improve learner engagement and desirable academic performance. According to Joseph (2015), instructional materials help promote active participation of learners resulting in content retention which is reflected in attainment of learning outcomes. Therefore, it is important for school management and teachers to avail instructional materials for social studies to become meaningful, simple and interesting to learners.

Social studies is a subject of study comprising of social sciences disciplines focused on people in space, time and also their values and norms and how they perceive factors of their environment. Syaharuddin et al., (2020) define social studies as an integrated course of study drawn from geography and history and other disciplines that deals with human beings. From the disciplines learners are equipped with knowledge, skills and attitudes for adaptation in their society. Madete and Nzilamo (2024) view social studies as a study concerned with all facets of people regarding how they live, in the world around them. They study include how man's way of living and the environment influence one another. Mariati et al., (2021) opine that the subject aims at helping students understand their environment both physical and social. It is through social studies that students learn more about how people interact with one another, how societies are structured and how individuals and groups

makes decisions. Social studies make learners feel part of their societies realising roles they play in the development of their societies from a tender age. According to the National Commission on the Social Studies (2010), the primary purpose of social studies is to help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse society in an interdependent world.

Discussion above reiterates the important of social studies in the life of a society. However, Abdu-Raheem (2016) laments that objectives of social studies are not easily achieved due to poor handling of the content, inadequacy of instructional materials in schools to enhance the teaching of the subject. Improvisation is the best remedy for addressing both shortages of instructional materials as well as the complexity of some materials in presenting social studies content. Jekayinka in Abdu-Raheem (2016) submitted that improvisation is economical; it helps concretize learning making it real, and give learners opportunity to take part in production of instructional materials. Therefore, social studies classroom activities in junior secondary schools need to be characterized by use of instructional materials, improvised and or original materials.

Instructional materials

Instructional materials are an integral part of social studies teaching and learning. These are materials or objects which help teachers in making lessons explicit to learners (Ogunjemilua, 2020) resulting in content mastery and academic achievement. Raheem (2016) perceive them as tools required for lesson delivery of subjects at school to ensure teacher efficiency and desirable student performance. Emphasis here is on importance of instructional materials in simplifying content thus saving teacher's time, as content will be grasped in a short time. On the same note, Inyan (2019) consider instructional materials as channels of communication selected for use by the teachers as an alternative to the traditional talk and chalk to concretize concepts during the lesson. In simple terms, Olawole in Gavou (2024) describe them as "materials of visual, audio and audio-visual category that help to make concepts, abstract ideas concrete in the teaching and learning process". Instructional materials refer to anything tangible and non-tangible that is considered useful in helping learners understand content better and faster. Non-tangible includes, for instance, relevant air-related sources of information, the space to mention a few. Depending on the purpose served by the materials, learners handle some during the learning process while others by the teacher mostly for demonstrations.

Criteria for selection of instructional materials

Teachers' skillfulness in selection of instructional materials is one of the primary factors in effective teaching and learning. The indisputable role of instructional materials in academic achievement in social studies will never be an oversight. Olayinka (2016) posited that students taught with instructional materials outperformed their counterparts taught without. Therefore, it is worth saying that, achievement of objectives rely more on careful selection and utilization of instructional materials.

Literature, (Busljeta, 2013, Shi, 2014) discuss a number of factors to consider when selecting instructional materials. Characteristics and interests of students, characteristics of available instructional materials, teachers' abilities and their level of education, availability and adequacy of materials. Additionally, Bukoje (2019) found the currency of the information relayed by the instructional materials and relevance of the instructional materials in addressing the lesson objectives as factors to be observed when selecting instructional materials for teaching social studies. Teacher's mastery of the content is required for choice of instructional materials.

Learner needs differ, so, teachers have to strive to offer equitable learning opportunities to address the various learning needs. O'Loughin (2020) highlighted that instructional materials should fit the context of the content, promote inclusiveness, and controversial free. Controversy in the instructional material may arise from issues of gender, culture and race. Good teachers modify instructional materials to reduce their biasness and increase their appropriateness. Above all, the importance of the space required to use the instructional materials, time set to use the material, as well as the availability of the complementary material like electricity, heat source, and air can never be overemphasized. Teachers' choice of instructional materials can either enhance or impede the completely teaching process.

Improvisation

Effective teaching and learning is achievable through utilization of instructional materials. However, literature (Amadioha, 2018, Olayinka, 2016, Darkal, 2020, Emmedene et al., 2022) highlighted gross inadequacy leading to poor education. Ogbaji (2019) advises that teachers should not only focus on what schools provide but look for instructional materials to improvise to promote learner engagement and improve academic performance.

Improvisation is teachers' practices of using alternative materials to enhance teaching and learning where there is either a shortage or a complete lack of the pre-determined material (Sibomana, et al., 2023). Similarly, Eriba in Olofu and Adeyeye (2021) improvisation as the development of instructional materials using locally available materials that can effectively substitute or replace the original one. The use of locally sourced instructional materials develops and nurtures teachers' creativity and fosters choice on relevance and learner characteristics (Ekong, 2024). Improvisation refers to "techniques of originating a totally new tool, instrument, material, device or modifying an existing one for a particular purpose" Ofoefuna and Eya in Ema (2018). Ndiokubwayo et al., (2018) argued the intention of improvisation to identify and use materials suitable to either substitute or use as an alternative to initially identified materials. The study revealed that improvisation allows teachers to modify their lessons to ensure they meet learner differences and arouse their interest in the subject resulting in content retention.

The main aim of improvisation is to simplify the art of teaching for increased performance and evident application of skills and knowledge in and outside the classroom. Ekong (2024) observed that social studies students taught with improvised instructional materials performed better academically than those taught with original materials. From the views presented, improvisation remains crucial aspect to address shortage of instructional materials in social studies classes.

Types of improvisation

A study by Adu and Adu (2014) found that improvisation practices of teachers can be divided into three types namely, improvisation by substitution, improvisation by modification, and improvisation by construction.

Improvisation by substitution was described as the use of miscellaneous locally available materials as they were collected without any modifications in shape or size. This become effective is the material selected serve the same purpose as the predetermined materials, for instance the use of oranges to improvise balls or cans of beans to improvise pots. Shaibu et al., (2023) caution that care should be taken handling and utilising improvised instructional materials as they are not the same as the original, they may compromise transmission of messages as they were either identified or designed for the purpose of teaching topics at a time. Improvisation by modification on the other hand involves duplication of materials to serve as desirable supplements to textual materials like drawings, charts, pictures, graphs as well as materials produced through the aid of projecting equipment. Olotu and Adeyeye (2014) posited that the choice of duplication helps the teacher produce cheap instructional materials in a short space of time.

The act of improvisation by construction involves the use of low cost material to create and design instructional materials for teaching purposes (Adu and Adu, 2014). This involves creating a new material using other materials, like mosaic from pictures. Eminah in Efedayo (2015) found students work produced from the use of pictures of magazines and newspapers serving as good examples of improvisation by construction or collected materials. Ekong (2024) stresses that the production of improvised instructional materials may be successfully accomplished through the ingenuity and resourcefulness of the teacher or in cooperation with his students. This sentiment was emphasized by Shaibu (2014) that, other people or specialists like carpenter, blacksmiths together with students have to assist with development of instructional materials once the teacher has identified the materials for use in their classroom.

Naibu in Anyakaorah (2020), classified improvised instructional materials into two types, role substitute and role simulation. Role substitute the original instructional materials are modified before use in order to be effective in its desirable function. For instance, using a plastic bag of rice as school bag. Role simulation involves constructing an instructional material from available materials in situations where the pre-determine

instructional material is expensive or not available. Drawings of instructional materials and designing of materials by teachers on manila to make charts are good examples of role simulation. However, the act skillful teacher as the duplicate has to reflect the original material lest it compromise the intention of the instructional material.

Instructional materials improvised in teaching of social studies

Teachers take advantage of locally available materials to improvise instructional materials schools that are not readily available for use. Table 1 below shows different studies and instructional materials improvised by social studies teachers to help achieve their objectives.

Table 1: Improvised instructional materials used in social studies classes

Study	Instructional materials improvised
Shaibu et al., (2023)	Charts, pictures, posters, beads, lock and locket, tread in making costume, toys, flash cards, worksheets, maps, atlases, globes, graphs, others.
Adamu (2024)	Charts, a mixture of pictorials and graphs, field trips
Evuti & Ali (2020)	Charts, chalkboards, pictures, posters, drawings, audiotapes, videotapes, models, display boards
Afedayo (2015)	Charts, models, maps, drawings, graphs, pictures from magazines, student work of good quality

Literature reveals charts and graphs as the most improvised instructional materials in social studies classrooms. Improvised charts are teacher-made tools to visually display information for enhancing teaching and learning. Zoch et al., (2018) found them to be sources of communication when teachers decided to collaborate with learners in developing them. Pictures have also been identified as commonly found in social studies classes, improvised to make learning meaningful. Charts and pictures are compressed data for simple interpretation by learners, and if colorful, their visual properties attract learners and promote engagement during the learning process. Other improvised learning resources identified by literature depend on the choice the teacher and availability of the material in the teacher's proximity.

Problems hindering teachers from improvising instruction materials

There is a number of problems hinder teachers' improvisation of instructional materials in teaching social studies. Such challenges can be categorized into three major causes, which include school or system related, teacher training, and teacher competences.

School/system related problems

Schools through principals have an obligation to provide instructional materials to teachers for teaching activities. They should also ensure they avail conducive environment to enable social studies teachers improvise instructional materials. Shaibu et al., (2023) identified large class size as one of the problems hindering improvisation in classes. Large classes need either larger sizes or higher numbers of instructional materials to fit the numbers of students in classes. For instance, some instructional materials considered role substitute include teacher-made charts, which requires qualities like size and precision in order to relay the intended message.

Regular utilization of improvised instructional materials depends on the monitoring system available in the school. Lack of regular supervision by school management specifically principals were identified as a school factor hindering improvisation of instructional materials (Achimugu & Anojah (2017), Bawa & Ibrahim (2017) and Stephen (2015)). Principals should guard against teachers' habits hindering improvisation like low motivation and reluctance to improvise instructional materials.

Teachers also identified poor funding in schools as a challenge impeding improvisation of instructional materials. Funding is required for purchasing materials for role substitution, which include ready-made materials to substitute the pre-determined instructional materials material. Unavailability of funds annihilates teachers' creative nature to improvise instructional materials limiting their ability to effectively implement the curriculum. Literature have also revealed unavailability of resources to access improvisation together with the poor culture of maintaining and servicing available resources as a problem hindering improvisation (Shaibu et al., 2023). Some improvised instructional materials acquired through production require the use of resources availed in the school. Therefore, if teachers find themselves in such unfortunate situations, they fail to improvise.

Teacher professional development

Other problems leading to teachers' failure to improvise has been attributed to deficiencies of their training. Improvisation of instructional materials is expected to form part of teacher training. Nevertheless, Mbaba & Afuzie, (2024) established that training of teachers in their general profession including skills and strategies for teaching, fails to cover all aspect of their duties including the production and utilization of instructional materials. In-service training which Achimugu and Onojah (2017) found inadequate in some schools and lacking in others can alleviate lack of such training. The dire situation renders teachers useless at the hands of the students they have to teach.

Teacher attributes

In some instances, the school, the community, students, and the environment provide materials enough to provide for teachers to select and improvise instructional materials. The teachers themselves become a problem due to lack of interest in putting local resources to use to benefit the teaching and learning process (Mbaba & Afuzie, 2024). Some of this teacher lacks the motivation (Achimugu & Anojah, 2017) to improvise learning resources more especially if they either have poor orientation in professional development or lacks in-service training.

Conclusion

Instructional materials are required in every social studies classroom for effective teaching of social studies. Shortage and unavailability of instructional materials in schools does not only immediately affect academic performance of learners but also their participation in the societies in the future and now. To avail instructional materials all social studies classrooms, teachers improvise those not available. Improvisation present a number of challenges that impede teachers attempts to either design, develop of select instructional materials. Schools should motivate teachers through in-service training on improvisation, provide complementary resources to help utilize improvised resources. All these will help in effective handling of the content resulting in achievement of the goals of social studies.

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