

# The Use of Homework in Social Studies at Public Junior Secondary Schools in Oyo, Nigeria

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## Abstract

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*This study was conducted to investigate the use of homework in Social Studies at public junior secondary schools in Oyo, Nigeria. The study adopted the qualitative research design. Participants were 20 parents, 10 Social Studies teachers and 20 Social Studies students. Being a qualitative study, the only instruments used was Focus Group Discussion Guides ( $r=0.88$ ). Eight FGD sessions were held with teachers, students and parents each. Data analysis was done with descriptive statistics and content analysis. Findings revealed that teachers were of the views that the homework could only be beneficial to students when such homework is completed and submitted as and when due. It is recommended that homework should be properly deployed to enhance students learning outcomes in Social Studies.*

**Keywords:** Homework, Perception, Learning outcomes, Social studies.

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## Introduction

Social Studies, which is categorised under National Values Education in the current Nine Year Basic Education Programme in Nigeria (FRN, 2013) is a subject that is capable of helping the nation to achieve its educational goals. The subject has been recognised as a platform for educating the youth on citizenship. It also helps learners to acquire problem-solving skills cope with issues and challenges of their daily life. Social studies also inculcate in learners good citizenship, the development of responsible values and attitudes necessary to make informed decisions on issues of personal and social importance.

Moreover, Ogundare (2010) claims that social studies has the potential of developing adaptive skills to adjust the vagaries of the constantly changing environment. In specific terms, the Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council, (NERDC, 2008) asserts that the basic purpose of the Lower Basic level (Basic 1-3) Social Studies is to emphasise the development of responsibility for socialising and humanising of the individual child. In the Middle Basic level (Basic 4-6) classes, it is to strengthen these socialising and humanising responsibilities as well as helping children to develop certain basic concepts, values, attitudes and skills for effective living. At the Upper Basic level (J.S.S 1-3), Social Studies is expected to promote the spirit of cooperation and patriotism in the students. Social Studies at the tertiary level aims at enabling students find solutions to societal problems around them through research studies. The foregoing strengths notwithstanding, the subject is yet to fully record success in the area of life skills. Life skills is an important learning outcomes in Social Studies. Life skills cover real, topical, sensitive, controversial

and ultimately moral issues (World Health Organisation, 1999). They are behaviours that are effective in situations of social interactions and which also serve as indicators or yardsticks for measuring, gauging and explaining behaviours in terms of etiquettes and mannerisms. Life skills are critical for long term successful functioning in life. They capture the psychological, emotional and behavioural resilience for responsible living. Possession of basic life skills are reported to be capable of influencing their academic performance, behaviour, social and family relationships and involvement in co-curricular activities (Ducwoth and Seligman, 2005; Diperna and Elliott, 2000).

However, research indicates that students do not possess the right basic life skills such as empathy, confidence, conflict resolution skill, managing relationships, taking responsibility, decision making as well as ideal values of integrity, honesty, dedication and hardwork needed to function effectively in the society which result to different maladaptive behaviours such as fights, disobedience, gross misconduct and other forms of aggressive and violent behaviours which are common among the students, remained a source of concern in the society owing to ineffective use of homework to promote life skills. Meanwhile, previous research efforts aimed at addressing problems of life skills in social studies were interventions (Salako, 2014; Abdu-Raheem, 2013; Adika and Adika, 2013; Oyekeanmi 2016), but with little consideration was given to the use of homework for developing life skills.

Consequently, there is need to explore other means of improving students' life skills. One of such means is homework which is the assignment that teachers give to learners to be done at home (Cooper, 2011). Homework is given to allow learners further practice on the material learnt in school, thereby

helping learners to develop independent study behaviour (Kitsantas, 2015). For instance, studies such as Otunla (2013), Ogunsanwo (2003), Awosolu (1997) indicate that increased and varied homework increases achievement scores; Arowosolu further reported that students performed differently in three types of homework. It was further reported that a type homework in which students' work together in groups to carry out an assignment was the most effective in facilitating learning and achievement. Homework was found to have positively influenced students' performance.

Interestingly, research indicates that doing homework does not only increase knowledge, it also adds to the development of life skills. Homework in the long term builds in students life skills in collaboration and cooperative; responsible decision making; hardwork; persistence; independence; competence; self-sufficiency; self-confidence and self-discipline. Homework has been recognized by education practitioners as an important tool of learning through which teachers assist learners to construct ideas to enhance their life skills. (Hetherington, 2005). The problem of life skills can be addressed through assigning of non-instructional, creative and group homework or assignment to foster the spirit of tolerance and cooperation in students. Some of the life skills that were measured in this study are making correct decision, problem solving, communication skill, listening skill, conflict resolution skill, goal setting, being able to solve problems of life and living, empathy, ability to manage stress, make friends, coping with emotion, interpersonal and self awareness and ability to think creatively, among others.

The values of homework notwithstanding, happenings outside the school are not given due consideration by parents. Yet, students remain in the school for a shorter time than they spend at home. This makes it relatively impossible for the learners to do all the required work in the school. It should be noted that learning takes place everywhere and is not confined to the four walls of the classrooms, as after leaving school, learning still continues through assigning of homework. In effect, the home should be seen as an extension of the school; and one way to achieve this is through the homework given to students by school teachers. This homework will help the school to see itself as an extension of the home and vice versa, and for the school not to treat itself as the all end of the school life (Chaube and Chaube, 2009). Yet, debate has been raging on the

propriety of giving home work to students and how often it should be given. This is one reason 'Assignment' or 'Homework' is included in the teacher's daily lesson note format.

Teachers' use of homework is an important variable in this study that has implication for learning social studies. Teachers' use of homework involves its purpose. In terms of purpose of homework in Social Studies, as in other subject areas, some homeworks could be given by the teacher with a view to reinforcing learning, advancing instruction, and evening opening up avenues for new learning. This informs the emergence of two main divisions of home work namely, homework given for the purpose of instruction and the one given without the purpose of instruction. Homework that instructs is used to pass teaching instructions to students. There are four types of this mode of homework, namely (i) the type of home work given for the purpose of giving learners the opportunity for further practice on the concepts or principles learnt in school, (ii) The second of homework used for instructional purpose is preparation homework. As the name suggests, it is used to get learners ready for the next class. It is aimed at acquainting learners with learning materials coming up in future. The teacher in his/her bid to recognize the learners as partners in progress might want to prepare them ahead of the next lesson by giving them assignments that may involve learners in searching for information ahead of the class. This type of assignment is prognostic in nature. The practice and preparatory homeworks are more common in schools because they are found to be convenient and they do not consume much time; (iii). The third type of homework is the one that the teacher gives to enable the learners apply the knowledge or skill learnt before to another situation. The aim is to make learners extend the knowledge acquired in one situation to solve problems in another situation; (iv). The last type of instructional homework is that in which learners are engaged in producing materials. The aim of this type of home work is to develop learners' creativity and promote their psychomotor development. Thus students are given assignments in local crafts (Rosario, 2015; Foyle and Bailey, 2015; Corno, 2016).

The other broad category of homework in social studies is the one that does not serve instructional purpose. This also has four sub-classes, namely, homework assigned to help learners in their affective development, such as keeping them busy at home. The next non-instructional home work is that given to promote social interaction among learners.

This type of home work is given by the teacher to make learners work with their peers for the development of interpersonal relationships among learners. The fourth sub-class of homework that is not assigned to instruct learners is that given to fulfill school homework requirements. In some cases, every school, as a tradition, could make assignment a mandatory part of school activities. This kind of assignment is not meant to serve any specific purpose but it is just given as part of the school's daily routine. This kind of home work is particularly common with younger children in nursery and early years in primary schools (Epstein and Van Voorhis, 2011)..

In the views of Cooper (2009), there is no consensus in research as to what purposes homework is expected to serve when given. Therefore, research on purpose of homework remains an inconclusive issue and will continue to gain attention of scholars since there is yet to emerge a clear picture of the role of purpose of homework on learning outcomes. This inconclusive nature of discourse on purpose of homework on students' learning outcomes therefore made it imperative in this study. Specifically, research indicates that homework promotes academic achievement (Zimmerman and Kitsantas, 2005). The issue of how often homework should be given also has not been given adequate attention in research.

Another component of teachers' use of homework is feedback on homework which is an aspect of continuous on-going evaluation of learning process that gives information to teachers and students about students' progress in school. Feeding students back on homework deals with the effects of knowledge of results, incentives and reinforcement on learning and performance. When a student is told the result of a test, he or she is getting knowledge of results. There are few actions which have no perceptible result and in most cases knowledge of result is important to the performer and will affect his or her future behaviour. Knowledge of Results (KR) has a wide variety of manifestations, visual, auditory and kinesthetic, sometimes appearing as a numeral score, sometimes as a financial reward or a nod from the experimenter. The effects of KR have been investigated in tasks ranging from simple hand movements to the learning of Mathematics and even in psychotherapy. The role of knowledge of results in controlling and changing behaviour has been the subject of extensive research for over a century (Trautwein, 2009).

### Statement of the Problem

Social studies as a discipline promotes overall development that learners need to make informed decisions in the development of the society. However, this has not been translating into appropriate and desirable values expected of the students thereby causing poor cultural orientation and bad behavioural patterns in the society. Similarly, the development of appropriate personal and interpersonal life skills such as self-esteem, assertiveness, effective communication, friend formation and the manifestation of the right basic functional skills such as ability to think critically, correct decision-making, taking responsibility, managing relationships, problem solving and conflict resolution needed by the students to function effectively are deficient in students which is a source of concern to the society. Previous studies concentrated more on instructional strategies with little emphasis on use of homework. Therefore, this research investigated teachers' use of homework at public junior secondary schools in Oyo, Nigeria.

### Research Questions

1. Why do Social Studies teachers assign homework to their students and how frequently do they provide feedback on students' homework?
2. What are the reasons parents engage with their wards' Social Studies homework?
3. What is learners' perception of Social Studies homework?

### Significance of the Study

The study has revealed that teachers' use of homework could improve students' personal and interpersonal life skills, community engagement skills and values such as self-esteem, confidence, creative thinking, problem solving, effective communication, tolerance, cooperation among others which promote attitudinal change in students and leading to responsible behaviour. Curriculum planners would understand the value of homework developing students' relevant life skills. Finally, it is believed that the findings from this study would show the way to go in promoting life skills of students in Social studies

### Methodology

This study adopted the correlational research design using mixed methods. The participants for this study comprised 20 students, 20 parents and 10 teachers. The study was largely qualitative hence, focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted with teachers parents and students. *Being a qualitative study, the only instrument used was Focus Group Discussion*

**Guides ( $r=0.88$ ).** The research assistants were involved in the conduct of the FGD. The Teachers', Parents' and Students' Focus Group Discussion Guide which contained nine structured questions on homework was used to elicit responses from the teachers, parents and students. The responses were collected through audio tape and video recording which covered four weeks. The procedure for data collection lasted six weeks. The data collected were analysed using content analysis.

## Results

**Research Question 1:** Why do teachers give homework in Social Studies?

Content analysis from the Teachers' Focus Group( FGD) session on reasons for assigning homework, its frequency, provision of feedback on homework and how Social Studies homework can improve students attitudes, life skills, values and behaviours revealed that Social Studies teachers do give homework to their students to pass teaching instructions to students and to aid learning; to enrich the curriculum and assists them to learn further in the topic taught; to cover other aspects of learning experiences not taught in the classroom as well as to reduce the level of play in students. **The teachers** further stated that they gave homework to students once in a week or every lesson since homework is part of lesson plan. The teachers admitted that they do provide feedback on their students' homework to determine students' strengths and areas for improvement.; to assist in knowing whether homework has been correctly answered or not; to determine the level of achievement in stated objectives through the mastery of the subject matter; to re-explain some difficult concepts and to correct mistakes where necessary. The teachers also admitted that Social Studies homework can improve students' attitude, life skills, values and behaviours by assigning of appropriate amount and purpose of homework e.g. non-instructional, creative and group homework develops the life skills and values of responsibility, decision-making, problem-solving, cooperation and tolerance in students; increasing the frequency of homework builds the value of hardwork in students; providing adequate and immediate feedback (e.g. marking, grading, recording and using homework as part of the continuous assessment), motivation and reinforcement (e.g. praise, incentives) on homework promotes the life skill of self-confidence which contribute a lot in improvement of attitudes, life skills, values and behaviours in students.

**Research Question 2:** Why do parents engage with their wards' homework?

Content analysis from the parents' FGD session on reasons for parents involvement in their childrens homework and how Social Studies homework can improve students attitudes, life skills, values and behaviours indicated that parents get involved in the Social Studies homework of their child to assist the child in his or her academic pursuit; to remind him or her to complete the homework; to know the child's level of understanding of the homework; to reduce the level of play at home, to correct the child on what he or she did not understand and put him or her through; to know what is going on at school and to strengthen home-school collaboration. The parents further stated that they get involved in their child's Social Studies homework by asking the child about his or her homework; sitting the child down, assisting and guiding the child in his or her homework; providing the child with relevant educational materials to complete his or her homework; helping the child to do the homework properly by using different methods that are quite different from that of the teacher with concrete examples that the child can see around; calling their children's teacher anytime there are challenges on homework; checking the homework and never provided answer or help the child to write his or her homework. The parents also submitted that their involvement in their child's Social Studies homework do improve his or her learning outcomes through effective teaching of concepts in homework to the child; monitoring and supervising the child's Social Studies homework could improve the child's problem-solving skills, value of cooperation and obedient behaviours.

**Research Question 3:** What is learners' Perception of homework in Social Studies?

Content analysis from the learners' FGD session on learners perception of Social Studies homework and how Social Studies homework can improve students attitudes, life skills, values and behaviours showed that learners had good perception of Social Studies homework. The learners submitted that Social Studies deals with man's physical and social environment; it teaches moral behaviours, attitudes, social values and skill; it is easy to understand, lively, interesting, simple and cheap to pass both in test and in examination; it is challenging and it provides the opportunity for student to study alone; it teaches events and happenings in Nigeria and around the world; they have high regards for Social Studies homework, focus more attention on it and want to learn more about Social Studies as their

future career; Social Studies homework provides an opportunity to check new textbooks which contribute a lot to learning outcomes especially life skills, values and behaviours. The students admitted that by setting time to research and complete homework properly and returning homework to the teacher at the due time develops a sort of goal setting, organizational, problem solving life skills and value of honesty in students.

### **Discussion of Findings**

#### **Reasons for giving homework**

The teachers also admitted that Social Studies homework can improve students' attitude, life skills, values and behaviours by assigning of appropriate amount and purpose of homework e.g. non-instructional, creative and group homework develops the life skills and values of responsibility, decision-making, problem-solving, cooperation and tolerance in students; increasing the frequency of homework builds the value of hardwork in students; providing adequate and immediate feedback (e.g. marking, grading, recording and using homework as part of the continuous assessment), motivation and reinforcement (e.g. praise, incentives) on homework promotes the life skill of self-confidence which contribute a lot in improvement of attitudes, life skills, values and behaviours in students. This finding is in consonance with Letterman (2013) who in his series of studies found that when more than 60 minutes of homework is provided, students resisted. On the contrary, however, Essien, Enu Donald and Gimba (2015) revealed that Social Studies homework improve their achievement.

#### **Reasons parent engage in homework of wards**

The parents further stated that they get involved in their wards' Social Studies homework to help them the child to do the homework properly by using different methods that are quite different from that of the teacher with concrete examples that the child can see around; calling their children's teacher anytime there are challenges on homework; checking the homework and never provided answer or help the child to write his or her homework. The parents also submitted that their involvement in their wards' Social Studies homework do improve his or her learning outcomes through effective teaching of concepts in homework to the child; monitoring and supervising the child's Social Studies homework could improve the child's problem-solving skills, value of cooperation and obedient behaviours. These findings agree with Chaube and Chaube (2009) who explained

that parents engaged in homework of their children to enable them do well in it.

#### **How students perceived homework**

The learners submitted that Social Studies deals with man's physical and social environment; it teaches moral behaviours, attitudes, social values and skill; it is easy to understand, lively, interesting, simple and cheap to pass both in test and in examination; it is challenging and it provides the opportunity for student to study alone; it teaches events and happenings in Nigeria and around the world; they have high regards for Social Studies homework, focus more attention on it and want to learn more about Social Studies as their future career; Social Studies homework provides an opportunity to check new textbooks which contribute a lot to learning outcomes especially life skills, values and behaviours. The students admitted that by setting time to research and complete homework properly and returning homework to the teacher at the due time develops a sort of goal setting, organizational, problem solving life skills and value of honesty in students. This finding is in line with the finding of Gifford (2014) who reported that 69% of the students indicated that they think homework is meaningful and that it reinforces concepts learnt in class, 64% disagreed with the statement that homework served little or no purpose, 57% received a variety of activities for homework, an overwhelming majority, 86% strongly agreed that they would be more likely to complete their homework if teachers let them start on it during class. This could play an important role in the possibility of homework improving their skills.

#### **Conclusion**

It can be concluded that giving the appropriate and interesting homework and deploying it properly could promote the development of personal and interpersonal life skills such as emotion, empathy, assertiveness, self-esteem, and desirable values such as tolerance, cooperation etc geared towards reducing bad behavioural disposition in the society in addition to its cognitive benefits.

#### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Teacher should emphasize more on the use of group homework, non-instructional and creative homework to foster tolerance and cooperation among the students, Frequency of homework should be increased to improve life skills, values

and behaviours of students. Teachers should understand that homework should be assigned in such a way that students would develop research skills such as collecting, organizing and presenting information. Teachers should adopt homework incentive methods such as homework bulletin board system, homework incentive banner, homework incentive punch cards, homework chart used in the classroom to motivate students to complete their homework easily. Teachers should incorporate homework into the continuous assessment record to boost the students' academic achievement and improve students' attitude to homework, that is all directed improving students' life skills, values and behaviours in students. Teachers should desist from using homework as a punishment for students.

2. Parents need to know the importance of their involvement in their children's homework, they should attend the PTA meetings of their children's school regularly and ask teachers how they can be involved in their children's homework. They should be willing to allocate regular time to monitor their children's homework daily. Parents should note that when helping with homework, they should not do the homework for their children because doing homework for children will not help children to understand and make use of the skills they are supposed to gain from the homework. Parents should rather provide guidance for their children by observing children to know how best they learn; setting a regular time for children to do homework; monitoring television viewing and talking with the children about homework, all geared towards improving students' life skills, values and behaviours.

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