

The Effectiveness of using Inquiry as a Method of Teaching Social Studies in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

Okogu, J. O.

*Social Science Education Department,
Delta State University, Abraka
E-mail: onoz4real@yahoo.com*

ABSTRACT

The study reviews the effective use of inquiry as a method of teaching Social Studies students in Nigerian tertiary institutions. The Social Studies subject is interdisciplinary in nature and content. Teaching it at this level requires the use of inquiry method to enable the students participate actively in the learning process in the normal classroom situation. The theoretical framework of the study is hinged on learning skills acquisition and development that are necessary for achieving academic excellence in Nigeria tertiary institutions. Therefore the inquiry strategies are recommended for teaching Social Studies through lead questions, affirmative questions, subjective questions, use of adverbial clause, use of phrases and objective questions.

Keywords: *Inquiry method of learning skills acquisition and development for effective academic performance*

INTRODUCTION

The inquiry method of teaching involves a specialized skill of a teacher to be able to effectively use the method in a given Social Studies class. Jerolimek and Foster (1976) and Aina (1982) note that the developmental level or maturation of the students, their interests and age should be given high attention in structuring inquiry-oriented learning-activities and experiences. This is because the Social Studies teacher using the inquiry method in teaching makes the value attainable as well as what the method of teaching should be to the students. The teacher could make the teaching boring or exciting. But in order to make it exciting and effective, the teacher should personalize learning in such a manner as to arouse the curiosity and interest of the students to stimulate reflective thinking to solve problems but not to use trial and error approach.

The Use of Lead Questions in Inquiry Method of Teaching in Social Studies: One of the essential aspects in the use of inquiry method in teaching is the use of lead questions. According to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1995) explains teaching inquiry method using lead questions as questions raised to guide the class collectively and individually to enable them to discover solutions to given Social Studies problems during classroom situations. The above showed that the use of inquiry method in teaching by using lead questions makes the method to be discussed in some studies as the same as discovery method. This opinion was expressed by Yelon and Wensten (1979). The word discovery means finding out. It is the process through which students find out facts or knowledge through the understanding of concepts. This is made possible by the teacher's use of lead questions. For instance, the following lead questions are found useful in

understanding a given lesson in teaching of Social Studies. Have you ever forgotten the title of a topic taught a Social Studies class before? The question above seeks to make students discover their recall memory and retentive ability. Similarly, the teacher raised lead question on how much of the lesson did the student gained during the lesson. The intention of the teacher in this lead question is to examine students' level of understanding during a Social Studies class. Therefore the lead question is essential because it helps the students to discovery for themselves a number of teachings that has taken place in a normal classroom situation.

Affirmative Questions using Inquiry Teaching Method: Findings in most researches showed that inquiry method uses affirmative questions in teaching the students to seek for knowledge. Affirmative questions are asked by the teacher based on responses that are "Yes" or "No". Dubay and Barth (1980) expressed similar view by stating that "affirmative questions provoke students in both reflective and inductive thinking. Also, Beyer (1971) argued that "for a teacher to use inquiry method in teaching Social Studies lesson successfully, using affirmative questions approach is very important". He advanced five steps that constitute the application of inquiry method by a teacher: statement of the problem; construction of tentative answers/hypotheses; testing the hypotheses against relevant data and generalization.

Constructive Affirmative Questions: Most affirmative questions are used to elicit information from students in a Social Studies lessons seek information on range of social issues, for instance, historical, political, economical, environmental, cultural, etc. Social Studies teachers introduce Yes or No questions as part of teaching activity. Some of these questions usually asked are: "is Nigeria a developed country?" "Are women meant to rear children in the family alone?" "Is the office of the presidency meant for men alone?" "Are political offices avenue for wealth creation?" All the above questions are in affirmative that provoke hot debate in a Social Studies class. This type of situation makes class to be lively, attractive and to create robust environment for learning to take place.

Teaching Social Studies with Subjective Questions: Inquiry method of teaching Social Studies at the tertiary level is seen in the use of subjective questions. These are set of questions constructed by the teacher whose answers are expected to correspond with the teacher's view or opinion. This concept allows the teachers to pin down students to a sort of subjective questions. The students are expected to attempt the questions for the purpose of the set of questions to test students' level and state of alertness and comprehension of subject matter. The questions require students to identify what are true or false through "Yes" or "No" answers. Instances of such questions are: "Nigeria gained independence from the British government in 1960, true or false;" "Tafawa-Belewa was the first Nigerian Prime Minister, true or false;" "Economics is one of the Social Science subjects at the tertiary institutions, true or false." "Peter is a name given to a male child, true or false." "Christ was the only son of God, true or false." Based on the above questions, teachers determine the level of students understanding in related subject matters.

Adverbial Clause and Inquiry Method of Teaching Social Studies: Teachers raise questions on adverbial clauses to determine the extent learning experience has taken place. According to the *Longman English Current Dictionary* (1995), adverbial clauses are words or group of words that describe or add to the meaning of action. In this regard, the objective of knowledge intended when applying questions that are constructed using adverbial clauses. Osakwe (1991) posited that students' behavioural objectives in a given lesson should be stated with performing verbs. This is because at the end of every given lesson, the students should be able to carry out an assigned instruction. Therefore, the purpose of questions is to investigate the abilities of students to perform assigned instructions. Since Social Studies deals with environmental issues, social problems, historical events and economic development in a given society, adverbial clause type of questions are raised to gather information from students on the given landscape that demand their knowledge of the place been inquired about. Here, the application of adverbial clauses of the place is used. For example "where is the area called Niger Delta?"

Students are expected to provide answers on the above question by given a descriptive and analysis of the region called Niger Delta. It is the description that constitutes the performance of students action on the instructional objective expected at the end of the lesson. Why is there so much kidnapping in the Niger Delta region? This question requires the students to find out reasons for kidnapping in the region. The answers requires adverbial clause of reason as the students are expected to state number of reasons for the unwholesome activity in the region. Thus, the ability of students to state some of these reasons shows their learning outcome; when was Alhaji Sambo, the former governor of Kaduna State sworn in as the Vice President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria? The above question seeks to find out the time in which the Vice President was sworn in. The answer requires adverbial clause of time. It is imposed on the students to test the accuracy of times in which some important events occurred.

How will national integration affect development in Nigeria? The above question is aimed at investigating the manner of national integration to development. Students are made to understand the relevance of integration to national development. Answers to the above questions form the basis of discussion which provides varied options to national integration that pave ways for development. This type of question aids the application of inquiry method of teaching the students. This is because it encourages the student to brainstorm on issues affecting economic development. The work of the teacher is to be able to provoke the students to further inquiry on issues that borders on economic development of a nation. This is an essential aspect of Social Studies teaching across all levels.

Adverbial Clause of Manner Using Inquiry Method in Teaching Social Studies: Adverbial clause of manner is one of the ways teachers teach students into critical thinking. Social Studies experts believe that inquiry method of teaching is one of the suggested teaching methods in Social Studies curriculum. According to Akinlaye (2002) "inquiry is a method, strategy of teaching where students are allowed to examine ideas, events, issues, problems and questions freely with minimum guidance from the teacher, and then seek

information to answer or solve problems. When using strategies, teachers involve students in relevant activities of gathering, interpreting, assimilating, investigating or processing information so as to make the students to discover answers themselves and then arrive at intelligent conclusion. One of the ways of guiding students in the above findings is for the teacher to be able to raise questions as guide to students' participation into learning experiences. This is a very crucial aspect of inquiry teaching method in Social Studies. For instance, The United Nations Education Scientific Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (1985) maintained that inquiry is not discovery of answers that are lifted from books, but development of answers by the students themselves based on results of their investigations. Hence, the application of adverbial clause of manner becomes relevant. This is because it enables students to tackle questions on how issues are resolved.

The Application of Phrase in Inquiry Method of Teaching Social Studies: A question based on phrases is one of the teaching methods of initiating inquiry. According to Longman English Current Dictionary (1995) are group of words together that have particular meaning, especially when they express the meaning well in a few words. They can be used to generate questions during teaching-learning in a given subject, especially in Social Studies education. Research findings in pedagogy indicate that the use of phrases in raising questions are well planned series of words used in question setting. Ololobou (1996) observed that teaching strategies are the umbrella terms. In fact an overall large scale teaching plan or framework, that encapsulates both teaching methods and teaching techniques in Social Studies. Though, strategies are broad whose components are methods and techniques.

From the above, phrase questions are strategies of prompting students to make them to tackle critical issues that border on their environment, political situation and socio-economic issues. When phrase questions are raised as strategies in inquiry teaching method, students are made to identify phrases used either in a given sentence or in passages. What is investigated by students is the meaning of the phrase in a given sentence or passages. Therefore, Social Studies teachers are expected to devise strategy such as questions based on phrases to evaluate the cognitive ability of students. For instance, the Niger Delta States are prone to oil-workers' kidnapping, or surrounded by tall vegetation.

Objective Questions of Inquiry Teaching Method in Social Studies: The application of objective questions is one of the ways in the evaluation techniques that is used to determine students strength of comprehension in a range of course content. Most research findings in teaching methods postulate the idea that questioning is similar to testing. This is because the teacher asks series of questions to collect information from students on what was taught and learnt. According to the Wikipedia Free Encyclopedia (2007), test is another method of questioning. The teachers test the students on what was previously taught in order to ascertain the level of what students have learned from the subject matter. The usefulness of objective question is to allow students to face simplified evaluation. The above concept is based on the fact that the teacher provides alternative answers to questions. Questions are spread to cover the course contents. The significance of objective questions is in the effectiveness of scoring after examinations. This is because assessment of performance becomes easy by the teacher. This method of providing inquiry into course

contents is done in the lower level of Nigerian universities. It is also useful for both internal and external examinations. Examination bodies such as National Examination Council (NECO), West Africa Examination Council (WAEC), Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), Nigerian Universities Post Examinations employ objective techniques of questioning in examinations. According to Ogunsanya (1984), objective test involves one of these four forms. They are true-false, multiple choice, completion and matching type questions. This indicates that the technique is usually designed and applied in such a way that irrespective of who marks the answers, the score of a particular candidate always remains the same. The main features of the objective test approach are that each student chooses his answer for each question from a limited list provided by the teacher. The basis for this method of teaching is on the ground that the technique is effective in testing the student's ability to recall previously learnt information. Also, the usefulness is mainly in assessing student's ability at the lower cognitive level of learning. Therefore, the use of inquiry as teaching method requires Social Studies teachers to be knowledgeable in the application of the technique to guide students' ability during teaching and learning situation.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this paper is to examine the use of inquiry teaching method in teaching Social Studies in Nigerian tertiary institution. Inquiry method of teaching equips the students in active participation in learning for the purpose of enhancing academic performance among the students. This necessitated the researcher to go into this study to create awareness among the teachers and students alike in Nigerian tertiary institutions about the use of inquiry teaching method in teaching our students. Therefore the inquiry strategies are recommended for teaching Social Studies through lead questions, affirmative questions, subjective questions, use of adverbial clause, use of phrases and objective questions.

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