

Perception of Teachers on the Teaching of Controversial Issues in Secondary School Social Studies as Remedy for Polarisation Period in Nigeria

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Abstract

Perception of teachers on the teaching of controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria was investigated in Port Harcourt Metropolis. Three objectives, three research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The study employed analytical survey design. Fifty-five (55) Social Studies teachers randomly selected from four public secondary schools formed the sample size of the study. Questionnaire on the teaching of controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies (QTCISSSS) was validated and used for data collection. Test-retest method was used to determine reliability coefficient of 0.75 using Pearson Product Moment correlation. Data collected were analyzed using frequency count, mean, standard deviation and t-test statistics. The study revealed that teachers had a better perception on the teaching of controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria and there are number of benefits of teaching controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies curriculum. Furthermore, the study revealed that there are number of factors that can hinder the teaching of controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies. It was recommended that controversial issues should be included and taught in secondary school Social Studies curriculum as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria. Also, Social Studies teachers should be encouraged to attend conferences so as to understand the benefits as well as the factors that hinder and enhance the teaching and learning of controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies curriculum.

Keywords: Controversial issues, Perception, Polarization, Remedy, Social studies.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the purposes of Social Studies education in the 21st century is to build students' skills and intelligence for self-development and also to imbibe the attributes of good citizenship for the enhancement of national development. Furthermore, Social Studies education helps students to develop good moral, social and intellectual attributes. According to Yusuf (2020), Social Studies education at the secondary school level aims at raising students who are not only expected to understand the society but become instrumental in handling, explaining and resolving controversial issues for the achievement of peace for sustainable societal development. Therefore, a unique character of social studies is its deliberate focus on man and his inter-relationship with his environment as well as the ability to offer practical solutions to human challenges. Based on this, Abubakar (2021) explained that the teaching of Social Studies education curriculum at the secondary school should include the understanding of controversial issues which can play a major role in the period of polarization and also contribute to the achievement of national goals.

Polarization is a global issue which means divisions and conflicts that relate to ethnic, religious, regional and political issues (Bello, 2021). These issues have often resulted in

disputes, disagreement and protest. In the society, polarization is caused by ethnic and religious division, political fragmentation, economic inequality and security challenges. Polarization leads to the spread of misinformation and this information causes divisions and increases societal rifts. Thus, in the period of polarization, the teaching of controversial issues in the Social Studies curriculum holds significant implications for the teachers, students and society. This is true because issues that are controversial cannot be avoided anywhere human beings are existing. The teaching of controversial issues can enhance the holistic development of students preparing them for active citizenship.

Controversial issues are problems that arouse strong feelings, divide communities and societies. Frazer (2016) viewed controversial issues as problems that do not have a clear cut solution. It involves a dialogue between people having differing points of view which creates disagreement among the members of a discussion (Harwood and Hahne, 2010) in Gad (2022). Gad (2022) further opined that controversial issues are debatable dialogue between two opposing point views. Controversial issues are also social issues. It is a collective concern that exists in the public. According to Mckerman (2012), controversial issues are issues that divide the society. These issues as stated by Mckerman (2012) are climate change, global health issues, refugees, youth unemployment, gun control, democratization, global warming, peace and conflict, cross dressing, banditry, abortion, LGBTQ (Lesbian, gay, bi-Sexual, trans-gender, questioning), domestic violence, human rights violation, October, 2020 End Sars, sexual orientation, gender identity, separatist agitation (Indigenous people of Biafra), kidnapping, Boko haram insurgency terrorism, electoral coup (Corruption like rigging), wars, military conflicts and foreign policy. Teaching of controversial issues as part of Social Studies education curriculum can prepare students in handling these issues of concern in polarization period, help students learn to deal with conflict and take on leadership roles in the society (Soley, 2016). Also, students can develop a critical decision making skill which is considered as the heart of Social Studies education. Sequel to this, the study therefore investigated perception of teachers on the teaching of controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Controversial issues are several societal problems that require solution. However due to different opinions, a single solution is difficult to settle them, therefore the issues become disputable one that do not have a clear cut solution. These controversial issues are climate change, global health issues, refugees, youth unemployment, gun control, democratization global warming, peace and conflict, cross dressing, banditry, abortion, LGBTQ (Lesbian, gay, bi-Sexual, trans-gender, questioning), domestic violence, human rights violation and Boko haram insurgency terrorism. In order to overcome the rise in polarization in the society, there is a need to include and teach these controversial issues in the Nigerian Social Studies curriculum especially at the secondary school level. This is correct because Social Studies education among other disciplines helps young people to develop competencies that will enable them address the various social, political and physical challenges that may arise in their environment. The study therefore focused on the perception of teachers on the teaching of controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to:

1. find out the perception of teachers on the teaching of controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria,

2. investigate the benefits of teaching controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria; and
3. ascertain the factors that can hinder the teaching of controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What is the perception of teachers on the teaching of controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria?
2. What could be the benefits of teaching controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria?
3. What are the factors that can hinder the teaching of controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria?

Hypotheses

Null hypotheses guided the study.

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between the views of male and female Social studies teachers on their perception of teaching controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference between the views of male and female Social studies teachers on what could be the benefits of teaching controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed analytical survey design and was carried out in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State. The population consisted of 62 Social Studies teachers in 12 Public secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis. Sample size of 55 Social Studies teachers was selected using stratified random sampling technique from 12 public secondary schools. Researchers' constructed instrument entitled: Social Studies Controversial Issues Teachers Perception Questionnaire (SSCITPQ) designed in a four point Likert – scale of Strongly Agree = SA, Agree = A, Disagree = D, Strongly Disagree SD and rated 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively was used to collect necessary data. Three experts in the field of Social Studies Education from the University of Port Harcourt validated the instrument. The corrections such as language clarity, spelling mistakes and sentence construction were incorporated into the final format of the instrument. The modified instrument was pilot tested on 20 Social Studies teachers outside the sample size from Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State and reliability index of 0.75 was established using Pearson Product Moment correlation. Data collected were analyzed using appropriate descriptive statistics of frequency counts, mean, standard deviation (SD), and t-test. The mean of 2.5 was taken as the bench mark or mean criterion for taking decision such that a mean response that falls below 2.5 was not significant while a mean response on or above 2.5 was significant. The hypotheses generated were tested to find the significant difference between the mean values of the views of males and females Social Studies teachers on the perception and benefits of teaching controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

The results of the statistical analysis of the research questions and the null hypothesis are presented on the following tables:

Research Question One: What is the perception of teachers on the teaching of controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria?

Table 1: Perception of teachers on the teaching of controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria

S/N	Items Statement	\bar{x}	$\sigma_{\bar{x}}$	Remark
1	Teaching of controversial issues in secondary school social studies can help students develop competencies that will enable them address the various social, political and physical issues that may arise in their environment	3.16	0.56	Accepted
2	Teaching of controversial issues in secondary school social studies can help learn to deal with conflict and take on leadership roles in the society	2.88	0.69	Accepted
3	Teaching of controversial issues in secondary school social studies can make students develop a critical decision-making skill.	3.04	0.67	Accepted
4	In order to overcome the rise in polarization in the society, there is a need to include and teach these controversial issues in the Nigerian Social Studies curriculum.	3.07	0.65	Accepted
5	Teaching of controversial issues in secondary school social studies can enhance the holistic development of students preparing them for active citizenship	3.00	0.66	Accepted
Average Mean		3.03	0.65	
Criterion Mean		2.50		

Table 1 showed that Social Studies teachers accepted all the items as their perception towards the teaching of controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies. This is because the entire item mean was above the criterion mean of 2.50. This result indicated that Social Studies teacher had a better perception towards the teaching of controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria.

Research Question Two: What could be the benefits of teaching controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean responses of teachers on the benefits of teaching controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria

S/N	Item Statement	\bar{x}	$\sigma_{\bar{x}}$	Remark
1	Students develop critical decision making skills	3.2	0.63	Accepted
2	It provides students with experience in social life and ongoing phenomena in the society.	3.33	0.64	Accepted
3	It allows the teacher to transmit knowledge and student dialogue with their peers in search of truth	3.4	0.68	Accepted
4	Help to inform, enlighten and embolden students to raise their hands and voice both inside and outside of the social studies classroom.	3	0.66	Accepted
5	Help students to develop ability to deal with controversial issues, debating with people who do not share their opinion.	3.5	0.62	Accepted
Average Mean		3.30	0.65	
Criterion Mean		2.50		

Table 2 indicated that teachers accepted all the items showing their perception towards the benefits of teaching controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria. This is because the entire items mean was above the criterion mean of 2.50. Therefore the table revealed that there are number of benefits of teaching controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria.

Research Question Three:

What are the factors that can hinder the teaching of controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria?

Table 3: Mean responses teachers on the factors that can hinder of teaching of controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria

S/N	Item Statement	\bar{x}	$\sigma_{\bar{x}}$	Remark
1	Teachers lack the needed skills and strategies on how to introduce controversial issues in class	3.2	0.63	Accepted
2	Teachers feel uncertain and unprepared when teaching controversial issues due to fear of emotional reaction and perception pressures	3.33	0.64	Accepted
3	Teachers are uncomfortable teaching controversial issue such as sexual orientation, sexual harassment and religious issues	3.4	0.68	Accepted

4	The role of social media in spreading polarization is also a challenge	3.1	0.66	Accepted
5	When dealing with political and social issues, students accept their parents and close relatives opinions as their own without giving any real thought to the issues at hand	3.5	0.62	Accepted
Average Mean		3.30	0.65	
Criterion Mean		2.50		

Table 3 also showed that teachers accepted all the items showing their perception towards the factors that can hinder the teaching of controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria. This is because the entire items mean was above the criterion mean of 2.50. Therefore the table showed that there number of factors that can hinder the teaching of controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria.

Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between the views of male and female social studies teachers on the perception of teaching controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria.

Table 4: t-test analysis on the mean perception of male and female teachers on the teaching controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria

Social Studies Teachers	n	(\bar{X})	SD	df	t-cal	t-crit	Remark
Male Teachers	22	14.06	6.10	53	-0.535	1.960	Not Significant
Female Teachers	33	15.72	4.60				

Key: n = No of Social Studies Teachers, SD = Standard Deviation, df = Degree of Freedom

* Significant at 0.05 level

The results in Table 4 showed that at 53 df and 0.05 alpha level, the t-calculated value of 0.535 is less than the t-critical value of 1.960. This showed that there is no significant difference between the perceptions of male and female social studies teachers on the teaching controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference between the views of male and female social studies teachers on the benefits of teaching controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria.

Table 5: t-test analysis on the mean responses of male and female teachers on the benefits of teaching controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria

Social Studies Teachers	n	(\bar{X})	SD	Df	t-cal	t-crit	Remark
Male Teachers	22	13.16	5.10	53	-0.455	1.960	Not Significant
Female Teachers	33	14.62	6.60				

* Significant at 0.05 level

The results in table 5 showed that at 53 df and 0.05 alpha level, the t-calculated value of -0.455 is less than the t-critical value of 1.960. This showed that there is no significant difference between the views of male and female social studies teachers on the benefits of teaching controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

This study found out that Social Studies teachers had a better perception towards the teaching of controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria. Also, there was no significant difference between the views of male and female social studies teachers on the perception of teaching controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria. This result is in agreement with the study of Ehman (2017) and Mckernan (2012) who agreed in their studies that controversial issues should be included in Nigerian Social Studies curriculum in order to develop critical thinking and Social analytical abilities of the learners. Also, the result of the present study is in agreement with those of Russell, Pellegrino and Buford (2017) who found that the teaching of controversial issues will help students to contribute appropriately to public processes and discussions of real issues in the society.

The study further showed that there are numbers of benefits of teaching controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria which include helping Students develop critical decision making skills, providing students with experience in social life and ongoing phenomena in the society and helping students to develop ability to deal with controversial issues, debating with people who do not share their opinion among others. It was further showed that there was no significant difference between the views of male and female social studies teachers on the benefits of teaching controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria. The result agreed with Russell, Pellegrino and Buford (2017) who found that the teaching of controversial issues can help students to contribute appropriately to public processes and discussions of real issues in the society.

It was found from the study that some factors that can hinder the teaching of controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria include teachers' lack of the needed skills and strategies on how to introduce controversial issues in class, Teachers' feeling of uncertain and unprepared when teaching controversial issues due to fear of emotional reaction and perception pressures as well as teachers' being uncomfortable teaching controversial issue such as sexual orientation, sexual harassment and religious issues among others. This result is in agreement with the study of Abubakar (2021) who explained that the teaching of Social Studies education curriculum at the secondary school should include the understanding of controversial issues which can play a major role in the period of

polarization and also contribute to the achievement of national goals. Abubakar (2021), however, stated that controversial issues when not properly handled could lead to extreme polarization which resultant effect will be attack on our values.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results, it could be concluded that teachers had a better perception on the teaching of controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria. It was also concluded that there are number of benefits of teaching controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria such as development of critical decision making skills and ability to deal with controversial issues. Finally, there are number of factors that can hinder the teaching of controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria such as teachers' lack of the needed skills and strategies on how to introduce controversial issues in class and teachers unwillingness to teach controversial issue such as sexual orientation, sexual harassment and religious issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results and conclusions the following recommendations were made:

1. Controversial issues should be included and taught in secondary school Social Studies curriculum as remedy for polarization period in Nigeria.
2. Social Studies teachers should be encouraged to attend conferences so as to understand the benefits as well as the factors that hinder and enhance the teaching and learning of controversial issues in secondary school Social Studies curriculum.

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