

Research Article

Teaching Social Studies in High Schools, Knowledge Construction versus Knowledge Transmission Methods

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Abstract: Teaching to transform lives requires both high-quality content and effective instructional strategies. This study examines the instructional designs that Social Studies teachers use to meet the subject's requirements. It illustrates how both teacher-centred and learner-centred approaches align with the constructivist teaching model. Various teaching strategies were tested to determine how students engage in constructing knowledge. Using a descriptive mixed-method design, the study explored the instructional methods utilized in teaching Social Studies. It recruited 84 Social Studies instructors from 14 government senior high schools in the Central Region of Ghana, and 1,400 students. The key finding is that relying solely on one instructional technique – whether teacher-centred or learner-centred – limits students' ability to actively create knowledge. However, when teacher-centred and learner-centred strategies are combined, starting with a teacher-centred approach and concluding with a learner-centred approach, it is more likely to promote active participation and effective learning.

Keywords: Instructional Strategy; Social Studies; Constructivism; Civics

1. Introduction

Social studies education plays a vital role in shaping societal moral values (Zengulaaru & Nyamekye, 2023). The primary goal of social studies education is to equip students with the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary for making informed decisions and improving civic competency. It is essential to recognize that achieving this objective involves more than just teaching the subject matter; it also relies on the instructional strategies and techniques employed by teachers. The subject can only achieve its purpose when it combines content with appropriate instructional methods (Farmson, 2020).

To help students develop critical thinking skills and problem-solving abilities necessary for responsible citizenship, it is essential to teach Social Studies in a way that fosters these skills (Bordoh et al., 2018). The purpose of this study is to examine the instructional techniques commonly used by teachers and experiment with available alternative instructional strategies that strategies which better engage students in the process of knowledge construction. The study aims to answer the following questions: What instructional techniques and strategies do Social Studies teachers typically use, and why? What alternative instructional strategies could enhance student engagement in knowledge construction?

In this study, it is important to differentiate between instructional techniques and instructional strategies. Instructional techniques refer to the tools and methods that teachers use to deliver lessons. In contrast, teachers use instructional strategies to apply these various techniques during their lesson delivery. The study aimed at assessing teachers most commonly used methods and strategies and thoroughly examined how these strategies could be adjusted for improved outcomes. The frequently used techniques resulted in the development of five distinct strategies, which were then tested in the classroom.

Research Objectives:

1. to identify and probe reasons behind the three most commonly used techniques and strategies by social studies teachers;
2. to explore and develop combined teacher and student-centred instructional strategies for improved outcomes;

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3. to evaluate the effectiveness of the distinct instructional strategies developed for enhancing students' classroom engagement.

2. Literature Review

Students construct knowledge through personal experiences (Farmson, 2020). This process involves students using existing information to create meanings, develop attitudes, and demonstrate new behaviours. According to Williams (2017), Dewey's constructivism emphasizes the importance of building on the prior knowledge that students bring to the classroom instead of assuming they merely absorb information from textbooks or teachers. Traditionally, teachers often focus on examinations and serve mainly as information providers (Williams, 2017). Textbooks are only effective in fostering critical thinking if the information is presented engagingly. Unfortunately, they (teachers' means of engagement and textbooks) often fail to develop strong critical thinking skills in students (Williams, 2017). Instructional strategies that emphasize critical thinking help students solve personal and societal problems (Crisianita & Mandasari, 2022). Thus, "critical thinking" in teaching refers to the ability of teachers to encourage creative thought during instruction and it is only effective when the instructional strategy allows the students to explore and create from either the existing knowledge or the new information acquired.

Thus, implementing Dewey's constructivism in the Social Studies instructional period is essential, as it focuses on teaching from what students already know to create a new understanding or knowledge. The role of the teacher is to help learners extract and engage with knowledge actively. Farmson (2020) suggests that true understanding comes from the ability to explain concepts. Learners connect their prior knowledge to new information, making it their own through personal interpretation. Teachers act as instructors or facilitators, guiding their students to adopt cognitive strategies such as self-testing, articulating understanding, asking probing questions, and reflecting.

The application of Dewey's constructivism model should be the foundation for planning Social Studies instructional strategies to allow social studies lessons to cultivate in the students, problem-solving skills and foster critical thinking and attitudinal change. This study is framed within this theory to explore how Social Studies teachers can construct knowledge using instructional strategies. Specifically, we are interested in how instructional techniques and methods in Social Studies are used to organize information around key ideas that engage students, helping them develop new insights while connecting to their prior knowledge, new information and real-life situations.

The existing studies on the application of Dewey's constructivist theory to Social Studies education suggest that there needs a paradigm shift in focus in the use of instructional strategies from teacher-centred to learners-centred for better classroom engagement (Larsen, 2022). Furthermore, there is a necessity to abandon familiar perspectives and practices regarding learning willingly and to adopt new methods that actively involve students in any learning situation. On the other hand, examining how students in Social Studies classrooms construct knowledge under teacher-centred instructional methods, where teachers dictate what is to be learned is essential. Additionally, attention must be paid to how students acquire and construct knowledge beyond the specific objectives set by teachers during designated instructional periods.

To better understand how students construct knowledge in Social Studies classrooms, we propose a redefinition of constructivist teaching that includes not only building on students' prior knowledge but also the capacity to create new insights from fresh information. In teacher-centred classrooms where the teacher is the primary focus, the students are said to receive new information (Boso et al., 2021). Critics argue this approach positions the teacher as the sole knowledge source, limiting students' engagement and problem-solving skills (Tamakloe, 1991; Martorella, 1996; Bordoh et al., 2018). Furthermore, assessments often focus on objective tests, which do not effectively gauge student attitudes and skills (Boso et al., 2021). However, just as the child acquires any other information prior to classroom and use the classroom activities to build on the already acquired knowledge, a well-designed instructional strategy could serve the student right to build on the just acquired information. Hence, the existing notion that students in the teacher-centred classroom are passive information receiver (Baeten et al., 2016) offset with a well thought instructional design within a period.

In contrast, learner-centred teaching is said to emphasize students' responsibilities and the teacher's supportive role (Olayinka, 2016). Teachers act as facilitators, with student

interests driving the learning process (Sakata, 2023). Techniques associated with this approach include project-based learning, discovery learning, role-play, small group discussions, and inquiry-based learning. Adopting these methods in Social Studies education is crucial for promoting positive attitudinal changes among students (Tamakloe, 1991; Di Biase, 2019; Ibrahim, 2020; Grant et al., 2020). It stands to reason that what matter most for knowledge construction is how the teacher assigns roles in classroom and not students' prior knowledge or new information given. Thus, a well thought teaching strategies that embrace information acquired – whether prior to classroom or new information from the classroom, and the teacher's directed activities give student responsibilities to create knowledge.

Recent research has underscored the importance of learner centred approach, highlighting its potential to foster civic values, social responsibility, and a deeper understanding of complex societal issues (Ahrari et al., 2013; Mangkhang, 2022). These scholars argue that instructional techniques in Social Studies—such as small group discussions, project work, simulations, role-play, field trips, problem-solving, cooperative learning, inquiry, and the involvement of resource persons—are essential for developing the attitudes, values, and skills that Social Studies teachers need to implement effective changes in their lessons (Ibrahim, 2020). According to Tamakloe (1991) and Martorella (1996), role-play is viewed as one of the most beneficial instructional strategies, as it helps students develop effective problem-solving skills.

Teachers design lesson plans based on their skills, available time, resources, and the classroom environment, often posing key questions about the most effective teaching methods and activities to achieve their goals. Tamakloe (1991) emphasized that employing a mix of teaching approaches fosters critical thinking in Social Studies, a view supported by Chick and Hassel (2009), who advocated for an integrated instructional strategy that combines teacher-led and student-led activities to enhance engagement and outcomes. Research shows that aligning teaching strategies with lesson goals increases student interest and success (Şahin, 2005), while strategies focused solely on information delivery may not build confidence in learners.

The problem teachers face in using suitable instructional strategies to achieve the goal of Social Studies is multifaceted. While adopting learner-centred teaching or teacher-centred approaches is essential, it is not enough to address the challenges Social Studies teachers face (Ahrari et al., 2013). Poor student engagement, often resulting from poor classroom environments and complex topics, poses a significant challenge (Mensah, 2020; Bordoh et al., 2018; Zengulaaru & Nyamekye, 2023). Furthermore, the shortage of well-trained teachers exacerbates this issue (Mensah & Frimpong, 2020). Even when effective instructional strategies like inquiry-based and project-based learning are implemented, challenges persist, including difficulties in fostering collaboration and student independence (Wilhelm, 2007; Belland et al., 2006; Marx et al., 1997). Ultimately, addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that goes beyond the mere adoption of teaching approaches

The existing literature emphasises the importance of constructivist theory in Social Studies education, highlighting the need for students to construct knowledge through personal experiences and prior knowledge (Farmson, 2020; Williams, 2017). However, the literature also reveals that teachers face challenges in using suitable instructional strategies, including poor student engagement, lack of well-trained teachers, and difficulties in implementing effective instructional strategies (Mensah, 2020; Bordoh et al., 2018; Zengulaaru & Nyamekye, 2023). Despite the emphasis on learner-centred approaches, there is a need for a comprehensive approach that addresses the complexities of teaching and learning in Social Studies classrooms. The gap in the literature lies in the lack of research on how teachers can effectively integrate instructional strategies to promote critical thinking, problem-solving, and knowledge construction in Social Studies education, particularly in teacher-centred classrooms.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a descriptive mixed-method design to explore and understand the instructional strategies used in teaching Social Studies in the central region of Ghana. Descriptive statistics were employed to analyse the quantitative data, while analytic memos were utilized for the qualitative data analysis. The mixed method employed allowed the use of both numerical data (quantitative) and textual data (qualitative) to triangulate the findings to increase validity and reliability. Also, it helped to better understand how students

responded to the instructional strategy used. The descriptive statistics used to analyze the quantitative data involved calculating means, frequencies, and percentages of the teachers preferred instructional strategies, students' score on test conduct to examine the effectiveness of the experimented instructional strategies to describe the characteristics of the data. Subsequently, analytic memos were used to analyze the qualitative data involved writing reflective notes and comments to identify patterns, themes, and meanings what students and teachers made out of the teachers preferred strategies and the experimented strategies.

3.2. *Participants*

Fourteen public Senior High Schools were selected for the study. Seven of these schools, including Nsaba Senior High, Agona Namonwora Commercial Senior High, Kwanyako Senior High, Swedru Senior High, Swedru School of Business, Nyakrom Day Senior High, and Sidiq Technical Vocational Senior High School, were chosen to represent schools in remote (rural) areas of the region. The remaining seven public Secondary Schools, located in the municipalities of Winneba and Cape Coast, were Winneba Secondary School, St. Augustine Senior High, Wesley Girls Senior High, Mfantipim Senior High, Adisadel College, Kwegyir Aggrey Senior High, and Ghana National.

The study involved a total of 84 teachers and 700 students. We selected 50 students and 6 teachers from each school. In each school, we used five classrooms to assess the effectiveness of the instructional strategies. We referred to a single technique teachers use to deliver a lesson as a Standalone Technique Strategy (STS). We referred to the combination of techniques in one lesson as the Sequential-Technique Instructional Strategy (STIS). The STIS involves using three teaching techniques in a specific order to achieve teaching objectives within a certain period. We selected a teacher (voluntarily) from each group who frequently used certain instructional techniques to use the STIS for a period. The combined teaching strategies to form STIS were inquiry-discussion-lecture, lecture-inquiry-discussion, and discussion-lecture-inquiry. Others were Brainstorming-Lecture-Discussion and Lecture-Role Play-Discussion. We also tested the use of the STS, both frequently used and rarely used, to ascertain if any of them can help students perform better than those strategies frequently used.

3.3. *Measurement*

We conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the instructional strategies used in lessons, with a focus on understanding student performance to assess the effectiveness of each approach – namely, the STIS and the STS. To start, we encouraged teachers to identify the teaching techniques they regularly employed, and from their feedback, we selected the three most frequently mentioned techniques for our classroom teaching experimentation: lecture, inquiry, and small group discussion.

To optimize these techniques, we proactively invited 70 of the 84 teachers to engage in a structured “teaching strategy experimentation” programme. This initiative aimed to identify which strategy would yield the most positive outcomes for student learning. By aligning the commonly mentioned techniques with specific teaching objectives, we transformed them into actionable instructional strategies, facilitating a diverse range of classroom activities.

Our evaluation of instructional strategies was twofold. First, we implemented the STIS, where one instructional technique was used for the lesson's initial segment, followed by a different technique for the next part, and concluded with a third technique. We carefully measured students' average performance under each STIS in percentages. Furthermore, we allowed another group of teachers to apply the frequently mentioned techniques as STS to teach a lesson within a single day. The results of students' average performances for each standalone strategy were meticulously measured in percentages and discussed thoroughly to inform future teaching practices.

The STIS measured included Inquiry-Discussion-Lecture Strategy; Lecture-Inquiry-Discussion Strategy; and Discussion-Lecture-Inquiry Strategy. The other two were Brainstorming-Lecture-Discussion; and Lecture-Role Play-Discussion. As their names and the sequence at which each technique occurs, teachers employ the technique sequentially until the planned activities are over. For example, in the sequential lecture-inquiry-discussion strategy, the teacher uses a lecture to introduce new ideas in the first session. In the second session, the teacher assigns students to inquire about the issues lectured on in the previous session. At the final stage, the teacher leads students in discussions. Likewise, in inquiry-discussion-lecture, the teacher first employs inquiry as he tasks the student to fish for information on the issues to be discussed. The teacher then discusses the information the

student acquired in class. At the final stage, the teacher uses lectures to summarise and highlight the saline points.

We employed two distinct approaches to assess the effectiveness of both STIS and STS. First, the same topic was taught using different strategies across all five classrooms in the 14 schools. Second, one strategy was applied to teach at least three different topics in various schools, and students' performance under that same strategy was evaluated. We selected teachers with comparable levels of teaching experience and assigned them to instruct students on social norms and behaviours. Specifically, we aimed to achieve three instructional objectives using STIS, while two specific objectives were targeted using STS.

3.4. Data Collection

The data collection process began in January 2024 and concluded in May 2024. We started by gathering quantitative data, followed by qualitative data, to provide a deeper understanding of the quantitative findings. We employed purposive sampling techniques to select Senior High Schools and Social Studies Teachers, ensuring that participating teachers had a minimum of five years of post-university teaching experience.

Qualitative data was gathered from teachers using open-ended questionnaires and focus group discussions. Additionally, we included closed-ended questions to collect quantifiable data on the teachers' preferred instructional strategies and techniques. To understand student learning under different instructional methods, we conducted class tests and engaged in focus group discussions with the students.

To explore alternative strategies for enhancing the instructional methods most frequently used by teachers, we allowed them to combine any three of their preferred techniques in various sequences while teaching students. We assessed the students using both objective and subjective tests that covered all levels of cognitive taxonomies.

Teachers participated in focus group discussions to provide feedback on evaluating the new techniques. Additionally, students engaged in focus group discussions to share their experiences, both conscious and unconscious, in constructing knowledge during the intervention sessions. We also observed some teachers implementing the STIS and the STS interventions.

3.5. Analysis

Descriptive statistics were employed to analyse the quantitative data, while analytic memos were utilized for the qualitative data analysis. To examine the data, we used direct quotes extracted from the questionnaires and first-hand accounts from the students. Student scores were calculated, and average scores were recorded for each instructional strategy implemented. Additionally, the data gathered from the focus group discussions were analysed manually, again using direct quotes along with interpretive deductions. We interpreted the students' feedback. According to Alhazmi and Kaufmann (2022), an interpretive approach to data analysis is crucial as it enables researchers to contemplate and reflect on the texts to uncover the true meanings conveyed by the participants.

3.6. Ethics

We ensured adherence to ethical procedures at every stage of our study, from entering the community to collecting data. First, we obtained permission and approval from the school authorities before initiating the research. The study was conducted in compliance with the guidelines of the institutional ethics committee at the University of Education. Teachers who participated in the study did so voluntarily and were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. To protect their identities, we kept all information collected from participants confidential. Each participant signed consent forms, confirming that their information would only be used for academic purposes. We identified teacher respondents as "Tr." followed by a number, ranging from Tr.1 to Tr.84, while students were referred to as "Student Rep." from 1 to 1400. These measures were implemented before the study began.

4. Results

4.1. Teachers Commonly Use Instructional Techniques

We focused on identifying the instructional strategies that Social Studies teachers commonly use. The findings are presented in table 1 below.

Table 1. Social studies teachers preferred teaching instructional strategies.

No	Statement	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Decision	Rank
1	Lecture	4.23	.81	Agreed	1 st
2	Inquiry	4.16	.82	Agreed	2 nd
3	Small group discussion	4.09	.83	Agreed	3 rd
4	Questioning	4.09	1.0	Agreed	4 th
5	Brainstorming	3.93	1.1	Agreed	5 th
6	Demonstration	3.81	1.1	Agreed	6 th
7	Role-play	3.74	1.1	Agreed	7 th

Source: field data (2024).

The findings presented in Table 1 reveal that the teachers participating in this study largely favored certain instructional techniques when teaching Social Studies. Among these, the most commonly used methods were lecture, with a mean score of 4.23 and a standard deviation of 0.81, followed closely by inquiry-based learning at a mean of 4.16 (SD = 0.82), and collaborative discussion, which scored 4.09 (SD = 0.83).

On the other hand, some instructional techniques were notably less prevalent in Social Studies classrooms. These included questioning, which received a mean score of 4.09 but had a higher variability (SD = 1.00), indicating diverse opinions on its use. Brainstorming was not as frequently utilized, with a mean score of 3.93 (SD = 1.10), followed by demonstration methods at 3.81 (SD = 1.10), and role-play activities, which had the lowest mean score of 3.74 (SD = 1.10). This data highlights a clear preference for more traditional instructional strategies over interactive techniques in the Social Studies teaching practices observed in this study.

4.1.1. Reasons for frequent use of lecture, inquiry and discussion teaching techniques

Responses to open-ended questions revealed that two significant quantitative reasons account for the frequent use of lecture techniques. First, teachers unequivocally cited large class sizes as a key barrier to using other strategies effectively. Second, time constraints were identified as another compelling reason for the dominance of lectures. Alongside these quantitative factors, two qualitative reasons emerged. Teachers assert that social issues and moral concerns, which demand attention, must be taught through lectures, as this vital information is often not readily available to students. Response from Tr. 5 encapsulated the participants' feedback on this critical concept.

In classroom situations, it is necessary to address misunderstandings and moral decay among the students. My experience has taught me that numerous moral wrongs need correction from more experienced ones. Teachers should use talks to correct their students. I often use lectures to address corrupted societal norms and values that have been infiltrated into our system through the internet, social media, and technology. When it comes to correcting morals, there is no need for a teacher to employ role-play, discussion, or discovery techniques. Instead, they need to be told straightforward.

Second, teachers indicated that the constructivist approach to teaching, which emphasises learning from the known to the unknown, might not always be applicable, especially in the context of critical thinking. According to the respondents, deductive thinking may not be feasible in certain situations, particularly when students need to synthesise information from various sources and identify new relationships and concepts. Tr. 14 accounts also summarised the concerns of many who prefer lectures to the rest of the instructional strategy.

I employ lecture techniques whenever I introduce a new topic to encourage critical thinking. By doing so, complex truths are presented to facilitate logical deductions. Social issues, especially those related to contemporary matters, are intricate due to the dynamics of globalisation. Hence, I think, teachers must present all the complex problems to students independently. With time, the students can relate what they know.

As shown in the quantitative data, most of them expressed reasons to prefer Inquiry and Demonstrations as their next most preferred teaching techniques. The central theme among the reasons was, to "involve the students in class activities". Tr. 23 believed that to avoid laziness, students should be allowed to be involved in all activities right from the introduction to the end. She believed that good teachers only guide students to seek information. Teachers

only plan for student activities.

4.2. Explored Instructional Strategies

The study aimed to explore the effectiveness of integrating teacher-centred and student-centred instructional strategies to determine which approach led to higher student test scores. By implementing a variety of teaching methods, the researchers sought to assess the impact of these strategies on student learning outcomes. This approach was specifically named the STIS. Through careful evaluation and comparison of student performance, the study aimed to identify the most effective combination of instructional techniques that would enhance educational success.

4.2.1. Sequential Technique Instructional Strategy (STIS)

The study assessed student performance using both subjective and objective tests under different strategies. Table 2 presents the average scores for students under each of the five STIS. The same topic was treated with different STIS. The results indicate that students taught under the Lecture-Role Play-Discussion sequential strategy achieved the highest average score of 81.40%. Those taught under the Lecture-Inquiry-Discussion strategy ranked second, with an average score of 80%. It's important to note that standalone role play was the least utilized by teachers during regular instructional periods. However, when combined with lectures and discussions, students demonstrated the best performance.

Table 2. Students' average scores under different instructional strategies for the same topic.

Class	Strategy for Teaching	After Intervention	
		Average score (%)	Ranking
1	Lecture-Role play-Discussion	81.40	1 st
2	Lecture-Inquiry-Discussion	80.00	2 nd
3	Inquiry-Discussion-Lecture	75.20	3 nd
4	Discussion-Lecture-Inquiry	70.03	4 rd
5	Brainstorming-Lecture-Discussion	67.01	5 th

Source: fieldwork (2024).

To ensure the reliability of the assessment, another set of assessments was carried out. In this second assessment, one strategy (STIS) was used to teach three different topics in one class at various schools. The average scores for the assessment are shown in table 3 below.

Table 3. Students' performance under same instructional strategy using different topics.

Class	Strategy for Teaching	After Intervention	
		Average score (%)	Ranking
1	Lecture-Inquiry-Discussion	83.10	1 st
2	Lecture-Role play-Discussion	82.50	2 nd
3	Brainstorming-Lecture-Discussion	70.20	3 nd
4	Inquiry-Discussion-Lecture	70.12	4 rd
5	Discussion-Lecture-Inquiry	65.01	5 th

Source: fieldwork (2024).

The results show that the STIS with lecture first provided students with the best alternative strategy to score higher marks. The results show that the Lecture-inquiry-Discussion Sequential Strategy and Lecture-Role Play-Discussion maintained their top positions. However, the Brainstorming-Lecture-Discussion Sequential Strategy gave a little upward performance as against the Inquiry-discussion-lecture sequential strategy.

During the third assessment test, teachers were asked to use a "standalone" approach to teach the same topic in all schools. The instructional techniques used were lectures, inquiry, small group discussions, role play, and brainstorming. Table 4 below shows the results.

Table 4. Students' performance under standalone teaching technique.

Classroom	Strategy for Teaching	After Intervention
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		Average score (%)	Ranking
1	Role-play	72.12	1 st
2	Inquiry	71	2 nd
3	Brainstorming	70.45	3 rd
4	Discussion	65.12	4 th
5	Lecture	64	5 th

Source: fieldwork (2024).

Table 4 highlights the effectiveness of the role-play technique in enhancing student performance, showing it to be superior to other instructional methods. Following role-play, the techniques of inquiry, small group discussions, lectures, and brainstorming were ranked in order of their effectiveness in promoting student learning. Meanwhile, it is notable that the average percentage scores of the students using these methods were lower compared to the results achieved under the STIS, as presented in tables 2 and 3 above.

4.3. Instructional Strategies and Students' Level of Classroom Engagement

The study gathered insights from organized group discussions with students that occurred after each instructional period. The topics discussed included their involvement in lesson delivery; and how the instructional experiences offered them various information and knowledge. Responses from all 14 schools visited indicated that students benefited from practical recitation, where they were tasked with answering questions using inquiry or role-playing. This approach allowed for greater engagement. One student representative stated, "I am more engaged and understand the concept better when teachers introduce us to a topic in the classroom and then ask us to explore it in the field (Student Rep 11)."

Students reported that when teachers allowed class discussions on a topic before prompting them to conduct inquiries, their contributions during these discussions were limited compared to when a lecture-first strategy was employed. The sequentially, lectures, investigation, and discussion prepared them for meaningful contribution. In contrast, the discussion-first strategy restricted their participation. Many students shared that when teachers gave lectures on a topic and then encouraged them to seek further information independently, it provided clear directions for fieldwork and made them more active participants. A few students mentioned that they enjoyed starting the process with inquiry, as it allowed them to discover information on their own.

Students noted that during the sequences of lectures, role-plays, and discussions, they could relate the roles they played or observed to real-life situations. However, not all students could be assigned roles during role-plays, leading some who were not directly involved to feel redundant as spectators. These students expressed feelings of boredom and inactivity during such stages. Nonetheless, many acknowledged that role-playing enhanced their ability to remember and connect with new ideas. One student representative remarked, "I watched the role student Rep.10 played as a mediator in a series of activities on conflict resolution. It reminded me of how my father judges us whenever my brother and I have disagreements."

This student also noted that if roles are assigned without prior guidance on how to perform them, the effectiveness of the role-play may suffer. "I managed to act as a mediator with ease because the teacher provided steps on how to approach the role on the first day," stated Student Rep. 10.

The students emphasised that the strategy of class lectures followed by inquiry or role-play and back-to-class discussion needs to be adopted by all teachers. The reason given was that as students feel engaged in learning through their quest to investigate issues on their own through inquiry, and role-play, it does not end there but the final discussion gives more insight. The processes also serve as reinforcement, since subsequent stages confirm or reinforce the ideas that have been presented during previous activities in the classroom. On her part, student rep. 11, stated that the strategy of going through a series of activities helped students to retain information received in and outside the classroom. She explained that it made her feel involved and had a stake in teaching and learning processes thereby contributing her quota to, not only learning but also teaching processes. "Teachers are those who are supposed to fish information out there and produce in class. If I am doing what the teacher is supposed to do, then I am fully engaged in teaching and learning" (Student Rep 13).

When students were asked about their engagement in learning, their responses provided two major quantitative indicators and three main qualitative reactions. Quantitatively, they mentioned being attracted to attending classes and being motivated to achieve high scores in examinations. "I have never scored above 70% in class examination ever since I came to this

school. If how it will continue like this, I will be happy” (student Rep 21). Qualitatively, they mentioned being eager to make discoveries, gaining deeper insight into everyday life experiences, and sustaining their interest in learning new things.

The focus group discussion also unearths how students’ learning level transcends beyond the set objectives for the instructional periods. In one of the lessons, teachers targeted students’ ability to mention conflict resolution strategies and demonstrate steps to follow to resolve conflicts. During the discussion, it was revealed that fieldwork exposed students to more knowledge than expected. Some students were tasked to visit the Law Court and the Traditional Council Court to ascertain conflict resolution processes. Those in the cities were given this inquiry assignment. Beyond the processes, students reported that they learnt moral lessons from both courts. From the traditional council, students reported that things that would have been brushed aside at home were made to know its societal values. *“I never knew it was an abomination for a wife to say ‘foolish man’ to the husband. The chief said it is a serious offence”* (Student Rep. 31). Morally, students learnt other lessons which were not part of the objective set from the law court. *“It was from the court that I became frightened to the extent that I vowed not to do anything that will send me to court, ...the humiliation someone went through at the court along put that fear in me”* (Student Rep.7).

The use of a standalone technique as an instructional strategy produced lower marks than the combination of techniques as a strategy for teaching. The lecture strategy has the least chance of allowing students to score higher marks. When students were asked to compare the use of STIS and STS, they all preferred STIS to STS. Some of them stated that there is no engagement as far as the use of lectures is concerned. *“Who are you to stop some of the teachers to ask questions when they are talking. They will only want you to take what they are saying whether good or bad”* (Student Rep 32). *“But sir, this time, I noticed that since last week, the teachers allow us to do almost the same thing they were talking about in role play and also discuss almost the same”* (student Rep 15). *“I do not talk in class, but since last 2 weeks I have been involved in role-playing, asking questions and I can say I have learnt because the engagement was deep”* (Student Rep 20). Student (Rep. 22) highlighted how he felt about previously organised class discussion and our newly introduced class discussion. He stated:

Unlike when teachers come to class and group us for discussion where you do not understand the issues so you cannot contribute, this time I got the understanding from the first two stages, especially during the role-play and inquiry stage. I feel proud to contribute to class discussions. I believe those days when some of our colleagues hijack class discussions are over. Teachers come to class, talk throughout, and bring difficult questions to exams. For once, I thank the teachers during this workshop. They talk, they ask us to do, and we meet to talk together. I think this is the way forward.

Tr.10 affirmed that students’ contributions after the lecture, followed by role-play or inquiry and discussion gave his students more power and energy to contribute to class discussions. Tr. 13 stated, *“I wonder how a student like Rep. 43 could stand up and make such a contribution in class. He narrated the moral lesson learned from the court and traditional council. Usually, she is not that type who makes contributions in class”*. Other teachers stated that the three-stage sequential-technique instructional strategies introduced make teaching and learning practical. Some of the teachers admitted that fundamentally, to make teaching and learning reflexive, teachers must allow students to confirm whatever information given in class from the communities, self-experiences and peer interactions. The prevailing opinion was that the best approach to addressing students’ declining morals through critical thinking is to start with lectures where certain foundations are laid and then engage students in activities through inquiry and classroom discussions. It was suggested that the teacher-centred technique is more effective for correcting moral distortions and introducing new information that may not be readily available to students.

Some of the teachers observed some problems they encountered during the exercise. One of the major problems they stated was time. *“A period for a lesson is 45 minutes. Should you have 2 periods continuous, you have 90 minutes. This is not enough”* (Tr. 9). Others expressed the organisational work as tedious.

It is practically impossible to do this all the time. Let us take into consideration the past three weeks of exercises we embarked on this strategy. It has not been easy. Teachers normally look for the easiest way to deliver the lesson. Whenever the processes become cumbersome, they cannot be followed. I started one lesson on Monday and had to have three sessions to complete it on Friday. The shortest one was the one I completed within two days. Even though I can see vast improvements in my students, especially in their thinking ability, I still feel tired (Tr. 15).

Some teachers expressed their concern about the various strategies practised in their

classrooms. Tr. 45 emphasised the importance of allowing students to engage in independent investigation. She stated:

One of the strategies I prefer for teaching problem-solving topics is to start by building on my students' existing knowledge. I encourage them to use what they already know to ask questions and gather more information. After they have made their discoveries, we can have class discussions. I then summarize the key points and takeaways to reinforce the learning.

Other teachers believed that an instructional strategy that begins with an activity such as inquiry, or role-play and ends in a lecture allows experiential learning. Teachers agreed that their students could inductively reason for critical thinking.

5. Discussion

Social Studies education in Ghana aims to cultivate responsible citizens who are creative and possess critical thinking skills necessary for problem-solving. The effectiveness of Social Studies in achieving this goal relies on both the subject matter and the instructional strategies used. The question arises: Do Social Studies instructional strategies foster knowledge and skills, or do they merely provide information for exam purposes?

The title of this paper raises this crucial issue. Given the increasing significance of Social Studies education in discussing values, attitudes, national identity, and discipline among the youth, we believe that many Social Studies teachers will strive to use the best instructional strategies to promote creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills among their students.

However, literature suggests that many teachers primarily resort to traditional methods, such as lectures, question-and-answer sessions, and demonstrations, which often fail to encourage the development of creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills as intended. In advanced countries that prioritize values such as honesty, environmental awareness, and patriotism, formal education places a strong emphasis on civic competence. This approach helps instill a sense of responsibility toward maintaining a clean environment and fosters honesty and patriotism.

Achieving these outcomes requires dedicated efforts to provide students with hands-on experiences with problems and opportunities to devise their own solutions.

This study discovered that the techniques and strategies social studies teachers often used from their highest frequency were lectures, inquiry, small group discussions, questions and answers, brainstorming, demonstrations, and role-play. According to scholars, one of the most important techniques, which helps students construct knowledge such as field trips, was not mentioned among the list of techniques teachers at the study area employed in their classroom practice. The teachers cited two main reasons for using lecture techniques frequently. Their major reason was that social studies were supposed to correct wrongs that infiltrate themselves into the habits of the students. Thus, giving straightforward talks is the surest way to go because teachers assume that students do not know much about why they are going astray. Second, teachers concluded that students should not always learn from known to unknown. In cases where the habits of the young ones go contrary to societal normal, those who know, (teachers) should tell those who do not know. Hence, teachers applied to learn from unknown to known. Kohlberg and Hersh (1977) established that schools change people's behaviour through socialisation and enculturation. Hence, one would wonder if teachers' approaches to change any moral decadents as they stated were effective. Nucci and Ilten-Gee (2021) postulated that teaching involves intentionally engaging in a series of activities which bring about learning. To teach is to involve your students in more than a set of specific actions such that someone is helped out of a certain situation. Thus, using a talk show to reform corrupt behaviour cannot be true. During the experimentation, we noticed that students did not perform better using standalone technique strategies for lesson delivery. It makes sense that since the performances were better under STIS, students learnt better under such strategies.

Learning from unknown to known is a direct opposite of the constructivist-learning model. In his accounts, Williams (2017), explained that to be constructivist in the classroom, one has to identify, build upon and modify the existing knowledge (prior knowledge) students bring to the classroom, rather than assuming that students automatically absorb and believe what they read in the textbook or are told in the classroom. This assertion presupposed that students know at least something little about whatever teachers have to teach in class. Teachers in the study area were of the view that many students are oblivious and ignorant about how social media, modern trends of socialisation, and globalisation have damaged

Ghanaian traditional values and norms. This study's intervention has proven that students can learn and construct knowledge from unknown to known when teachers use the STIS in classroom practices. The results of the test conducted during the study suggested that students perform better under the use of STIS than they were under STS. Lecture-Role Play-Discussion sequence means students, through the lecture approach, were first given the information they supposedly do not know. They were then tasked to play roles using the information they got during lectures. The last stage was for them to have group discussions on the same. During focus group discussions, students admitted that they were able to contribute meaningfully since they had a full understanding of the topic being discussed. The first two steps, lecture and role-play gave all the students the needed understanding to contribute. Some of the Teachers believed that when a complex truth, especially those related to contemporary issues, is being presented, it must be done through lectures to allow deduction thinking. Students, through the test conducted and focus group discussions, denied the teachers' assertion and confirmed what scholars had already said that the best approach for teachers to induce critical thinking in social studies class is through an integrated instructional strategy (Tamakloe, 1991; Chick & Hassel, 2009). A mere presentation of the information to the students did not serve the students the needed skills to embark on logical deduction as some teachers raised.

The classroom experimentations done during this study have shown that students respond much better to some instructional strategies than others. Across the schools and with different students, teachers, and topics, students demonstrated that when teachers give good background information through lectures and continue to create opportunities for students to make their discoveries, a level-play field is created for all forms of students. Thus, teachers starting lessons with lectures to explain compressed truth to students and guide the students to perform a series of activities has proven to be the best option. Individual differences in the classroom (Devkota, 2022) are catered for during the use of the STIS model of instructional strategies.

In the academic setting, educators employ a variety of instructional strategies, with lectures being the most widely utilized. However, it was observed during our experimentations that students performed poorly and were least engaged during these lecture sessions. Scholars have stated that any teaching method that does not engage the learner meaningfully may not produce the desired results (Tamakloe, 1991). Students' feedback and test results indicated that employing lectures, or any other standalone technique, to teach Social Studies has less student engagement rate and dilutes the purpose of the subject as it fails to foster the necessary skills, attitudes, and values essential for problem-solving (Ibrahim, 2020). Existing studies have shown that an inquiry strategy is suitable for inculcating civic values and social responsibility in the learners (Ahrari et al., 2013). However, the findings from the current study revealed that employing inquiry alone does not enable students to comprehend the complexities of society as previous studies suggested. This study found that students excel when instructional techniques are sequentially arranged in such a way that complex truths are first lectured followed by a student activity-based technique and classroom discussions. Students' test results and feedback from the focus group discussions indicated that, in comparison, employing a standalone technique does not provide as much room for critical thinking (Chick & Hassel, 2009) as that of an integrated approach.

In the standalone approach, students had less space to be engaged because the processes needed to engage all sorts of students with various learning needs were curtailed prematurely due to time and insufficient activities (Wilhelm, 2007; Parker, 2007). This discovery sheds more light on existing studies that suggest a learner-centred approach allows for more student engagement compared to a teacher-centred approach (Di Biase, 2019; van de Kuilen et al., 2022). However, what is new in this study is that a standalone technique designed as an instructional strategy has less capacity to engage students compared to the combination of teacher-centred and learner-centred approaches to form a STIS. The model is likely to be effective if teachers devote enough time to plan and arrange various techniques sequentially according to what needs to be achieved both immediately and in the long term. The current study provides a comprehensive overview of the challenges associated with scaffolding in students' learning, as outlined by Belland, Ertmer and Simons (2006). Sequential implementation of instructional strategies effectively prepares students to tackle subsequent challenges, reducing the reliance on existing knowledge alone. Lecturing effectively breaks down complex truths to align with students' existing knowledge, enhancing the effectiveness of subsequent student-based activities. However, the study could not address the issues raised by Marx, Blumenfeld, Krajcik, and Soloway (1997) regarding the time-consuming nature of

project-based strategies, the challenges in designing authentic assessments, and the struggle to balance student independence with information control. The time allocation per subject per period was found to be not enough for the implementation of STIS. In addition, teachers' skills in embarking on lectures were observed to be questionable.

Despite receiving high praise from Social Studies educators and scholars (Tamakloe, 1991; Martorella, 1996; Ibrahim, 2020), role-play was found to be the least-used instructional strategy for teaching Social Studies in the study area. The challenges related to time allocation and difficulty in planning and designing were cited as hindrances to its use. However, during the experimentations, role-play emerged as the most effective standalone instructional technique. Students were able to remember what they or their colleagues did, which resulted in the highest average test scores. Students acknowledged that role-play was especially helpful when it came after a lecture briefing.

The teachers were familiar with constructivism as a philosophy for teaching Social Studies (Farmson, 2020) and understood the reasoning behind choosing its associated instructional strategies for lessons. According to Williams (2017), being a constructivist means focusing on identifying, building upon, and modifying students' existing knowledge (prior knowledge) through a participatory approach. This study utilized both teacher-centred and learner-centred approaches to promote constructivism as a teaching philosophy. It was noted that for students to effectively build on their existing knowledge, teachers should simplify complex issues related to societal values and cultural norms, as well as any information conflicting with students' beliefs so that students can relate them to their existing knowledge. Therefore, to ensure the deductive acquisition of knowledge, learning from the unknown to the known is possible when the instructional strategy includes a sequence of teacher-centred (lecture) and learner-centred techniques. This broadens the scope for students to connect new knowledge to their existing knowledge for effective participation and knowledge transfer.

6. Conclusions

This study aimed to investigate how social education strategies can enhance the development of knowledge and skills. Our findings suggest that when instructional strategies are used in isolation, whether they are learner-centred or teacher-centred, there is limited opportunity for students to actively construct knowledge. However, when teacher-centred and learner-centred strategies are combined sequentially, starting with a teacher-centred approach and concluding with a learner-centred approach, it is more likely to promote active participation and effective learning. Academic performance improves when teachers use the STIS approach to teaching. Students' deductive thinking is enhanced when they are allowed to explore topics beyond the classroom and subsequently engage in activities such as role-playing, discussions, and demonstrations in class.

To enhance the effectiveness of Social Studies education in Ghana, we recommend shifting the mode of instruction from standalone techniques to sequential-technique instructional strategies. This shift can help achieve the core mandate of producing critical thinkers and civically competent citizens. Collaboration between the Ministry of Education, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA), the Ghana Education Service, and the National Social Studies Association of Ghana is essential to produce an instructional strategy document. This document should specify suggested instructional strategies to be used for developing specific skills, attitudes, and values at different levels of Social Studies education in Ghana. These tailored instructional strategies should cover various topics in Social Studies at all levels, and the manual should outline when and how to use the strategies to encourage critical thinking for problem-solving. Implementing these innovative instructional strategies will make Social Studies a contemporary and practical subject for developing problem-solving skills.

Tertiary educations that train Social Studies teachers in Ghana should be brought on board for effective instructional strategies in the classrooms. Universities must be involved in the issuance of professional licenses to Social Studies teachers. Universities must be responsible for practically assessing teachers' instructional strategy skills acquisition. As the universities do this assessment, it would also allow them to review their (universities) contents and training mode.

The study's limitation was that some teachers refused to avail themselves of the study and we identified them and excluded them from the study, which if they had contributed, would have influenced the research findings. The time available to implement the instructional techniques was insufficient to thoroughly test their effectiveness. Additionally,

the varying skill levels of teachers and the intelligence quotients of students could significantly impact the results.

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Informed Consent Statement: All the respondents were asked to sign a consent form and were made to understand that participation was not compulsory. Our respondents signed the forms. Those who opted out were allowed to go.

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