

Challenges in the Utilisation of Instructional Materials by Social Studies Teachers in Colleges of Education, Northern Ghana: Implications for Teaching and Learning Outcomes

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Research Article

Keywords: Instructional Materials, Social Studies Education, Challenges, Teaching Efficacy, Learning Outcomes

Posted Date: September 21st, 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-10852435/v1>

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Additional Declarations: No competing interests reported.

Abstract

This research sought to investigate the diverse obstacles encountered by Social Studies teachers in Colleges of Education in Ghana's Northern Region in using instructional resources, and to offer suggestions for better material integration to improve teaching effectiveness and student achievement. Anchored in the Constructivist Learning Theory, the research utilised a qualitative methodology, employing a descriptive research framework to clarify the attributes of these challenges without establishing causal relationships or making extensive generalisations. The sample consisted of all Social Studies instructors in Colleges of Education in the Northern Region of Ghana, from whom individuals were selected through purposive sampling. Data were gathered via semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, supplemented by an observation checklist. The gathered data were subjected to thematic analysis, which included immersion, initial coding, topic investigation, assessment, and clarification, to uncover patterns associated with challenges in instructional materials. The results uncovered considerable obstacles, such as resource deficiencies (outdated/inadequate materials), technological and infrastructural constraints (unreliable internet, power interruptions), and contextual impediments (absence of culturally relevant and linguistically appropriate resources, inadequate professional training). These challenges jointly obstruct the dissemination of knowledge, the cultivation of critical thinking, and the equity of evaluation. The research determined that these intricate barriers hinder the effective utilisation of educational materials and constructivist methodologies. Suggestions include enhanced government support for modern, culturally relevant resources, significant investment in technological infrastructure, and cohesive professional development programs to empower teachers.

1. INTRODUCTION

The use of instructional materials in Social Studies education is essential worldwide, particularly in Africa, including Ghana, as these resources greatly improve teaching and learning outcomes. Instructional materials, including textbooks, visual aids, and digital tools, provide structured frameworks for conveying complex Social Studies concepts, enhancing student engagement, and enabling thorough evaluation. Nonetheless, despite their acknowledged significance, various problems hinder their effective application in diverse circumstances. Instructional materials in Social Studies worldwide have evolved to integrate multimedia and technology-enhanced resources to foster active learning and critical thinking. The incorporation of digital platforms, interactive simulations, and multimedia presentations has revolutionised traditional Social Studies classrooms into vibrant learning settings (Dange, 2024). These resources accommodate diverse learning styles and empower teachers to address complex socio-political themes effectively. However, inequalities in access to technology and resources persist even in wealthy nations. Teachers frequently encounter limitations, including inadequate training on emerging instructional technology and restricted institutional support, which impede optimal utilisation (Smith & Jones, 2019). The rapid pace of socio-political transformation necessitates ongoing revision of instructional content, posing challenges to sustaining the relevance of educational resources globally (Brown, 2024).

The use of instructional resources in Social Studies across the African continent demonstrates a complex interplay among socio-economic, infrastructural, and cultural factors. Numerous studies indicate that various African nations face systemic difficulties in acquiring sufficient and relevant instructional resources due to financial and infrastructural constraints (Nkambule, 2018). The restrictions are further intensified by insufficient teacher training programs that fail to adequately prioritise the incorporation of instructional materials into teaching practices (Bordoh, 2026; Eshun, Ofosu, Peprah, & Bordoh, 2026). The digital divide constitutes a substantial obstacle; in some areas, access to energy and Internet connectivity is irregular, limiting the utilisation of technology-driven educational resources (Opoku & Asare, 2019). The cultural incongruence between standardised educational materials and varied local circumstances frequently leads to student disengagement and a reduced sense of relevance (Anani & Dzameshie, 2017). As a result, teachers often engage in improvisation, modifying available resources in ways that may fail to fulfil curricular goals or student learning requirements adequately.

The use of instructional materials in Social Studies at Colleges of Education in Ghana is marked by commitment despite many challenges. Research in the Northern Region of Ghana indicates that teachers frequently face insufficient resources, such as obsolete textbooks and a lack of visual aids that correspond with the curriculum's changing requirements (Bordoh, 2025). The limited financial resources of educational institutions hinder the acquisition of contemporary and culturally relevant materials, forcing teachers to rely heavily on improvisation (Gyebi, 2025). Technological limitations exacerbate these challenges; sporadic internet connectivity and recurrent power failures hinder the utilisation of digital instructional tools, compromising efforts to establish interactive and engaging learning experiences (Opoku & Asare, 2019; Gyebi, 2025). Moreover, infrastructural obstacles, like inadequate classroom space and insufficient facilities for multimedia presentations, impede the efficient use of materials (Nyabuto & Onguko, 2018; Gyebi, 2025).

Contextual considerations specific to Ghana's Northern Region add further complication. Tutors emphasise the lack of instructional materials that represent local cultural narratives, which impacts students' connection to the curriculum and reduces participation (Anani & Dzameshie, 2017). Language hurdles arise from the prevalence of local dialects over English, necessitating adaptations to make Social Studies information pertinent and accessible (Candrawati & Purbani, 2025). Furthermore, limited professional development opportunities hinder tutors' ability to effectively integrate instructional content into their teaching, thereby affecting both pedagogy and evaluation (Spratt, 2019).

The difficulties associated with the use of instructional materials directly affect the evaluation of Social Studies lessons. The dependence of tutors on obsolete and inadequate resources constrains the scope and profundity of knowledge conveyed to pupils, hindering their capacity to cultivate critical thinking and analytical skills vital for thorough assessment results (Bordoh, 2025 et al., 2018; Gyebi, 2025). The variability in resource availability compromises fair access to educational instruments, consequently impacting student performance and engagement. Moreover, infrastructural and technological constraints hinder the implementation of novel evaluation methodologies that utilise multimedia and

interactive platforms (Opoku & Asare, 2019; Gyebi, 2025). These characteristics collectively create an instructional environment in which tests may inadequately reflect student competencies or foster significant learning experiences.

Tutors push for increased government support to strengthen resource allocation and infrastructure development in Colleges of Education (Gyebi, 2025). Continuous professional development programs focused on integrating instructional materials are emphasised to enhance teachers' pedagogical proficiency and confidence (Gyebi, 2025). Additionally, there is a demand for culturally sensitive resources that align with the local contexts of students in the Northern Region to enhance engagement and relevance (Anani & Dzameshie, 2017; Gyebi, 2025). The use of instructional resources in Social Studies education is universally acknowledged as essential for effective teaching and evaluation; nonetheless, significant problems persist, particularly in African and Ghanaian contexts. Mitigating resource limitations, infrastructural deficiencies, technological constraints, and contextual relevance challenges through coordinated policy, investment, and professional development initiatives is essential for optimising the utilisation of instructional materials and enhancing Social Studies educational outcomes. The study sought to examine the difficulties encountered by tutors in Colleges of Education in the Northern Region of Ghana in utilising instructional materials for teaching Social Studies, and to explore recommendations for enhancing material integration to improve teaching efficacy and student learning outcomes. The study seeks to answer the following research question: What challenges do Tutors of Colleges of Education face in using instructional materials to teach Social Studies in the Northern Region of Ghana?

2. Literature Review on Challenges and Barriers to Instructional Material Utilisation in Colleges of Education

Instructional material utilisation is crucial for effective teaching and learning experiences in Colleges of Education in Ghana. However, several challenges and barriers hinder the seamless integration of instructional materials in the teaching and learning of Social Studies concepts.

Resource Limitations

Inadequate resources, including textbooks, visual aids, and technology-enhanced materials, are among the significant challenges faced by Colleges of Education in Ghana (Bordoh, 2025). Many Colleges struggle to secure up-to-date, diverse instructional materials that align with the Social Studies curriculum due to insufficient funds. As a result, teachers often resort to outdated or generic materials that may not adequately address the diverse learning needs of their students (Bordoh, 2025). This posits that Insufficient resources result in diminished teaching quality, compelling teachers to rely on obsolete or generic materials. This hinders student engagement and educational outcomes, as the resources fail to address diverse needs or contemporary curricular standards. It further amplifies the strain on teachers, who are always required to adapt to fill these voids. As a result, learners forfeit access to current

knowledge, hindering the cultivation of analytical skills and practical applicability. It fundamentally compromises the essential objectives of Social Studies education.

Technological Constraints

The inadequate access to technology and limited digital infrastructure in some Colleges of Education pose significant barriers to the utilisation of instructional materials (Opoku & Asare, 2019). Technology-enhanced materials, such as online resources, interactive platforms, and multimedia presentations, have proven effective in engaging students and promoting active learning. However, in Ghanaian colleges where technology is scarce, teachers face challenges in accessing and effectively utilising digital resources, hindering their ability to create dynamic and interactive learning experiences (Opoku & Asare, 2019). This implies that insufficient technology hinders teachers from utilising captivating digital tools such as online platforms and multimedia presentations. This significantly limits the development of dynamic, interactive educational experiences, which are essential for fostering active student involvement. As a result, learners forgo opportunities for enhanced education, thereby hindering the development of their analytical reasoning skills. Teachers are compelled to rely on conventional techniques, which affects the overall calibre and contemporaneity of Social Studies instruction. This technological disparity ultimately hampers pupils and constrains the possibilities for creative teaching methods.

Contextual Barriers

The unique contextual factors of Colleges of Education in Ghana, particularly in the Northern Region, can also pose barriers to the utilisation of instructional materials (Anani & Dzameshie, 2017). Limited teacher training and professional development opportunities on instructional material integration can impact tutors' confidence and competence in utilising diverse resources effectively. Moreover, aligning instructional materials with the local cultural context and students' specific needs can be challenging, particularly when materials are not culturally relevant or do not reflect students' local realities. This denotes that the distinctive circumstances of Ghana's Northern Region pose multiple obstacles to efficient teaching. Insufficient teacher training undermines instructors' confidence and proficiency in utilising a range of resources. Educational resources frequently lack cultural significance, failing to resonate with students' local contexts and experiences. This discordance may result in student disinterest and obstruct profound learning. Ultimately, these contextual elements undermine the overall efficacy of Social Studies instruction in the area.

Infrastructure Challenges

Colleges of Education in Ghana face infrastructure challenges that affect the utilisation of instructional materials (Nyabuto & Onguko, 2018). Insufficient classroom space, lack of storage, and inadequate multimedia presentation equipment can hinder teachers' ability to use a variety of instructional materials effectively. The evidence indicates that infrastructural obstacles in Ghanaian Colleges of Education significantly hinder teachers' ability to use a variety of teaching resources effectively. Inadequate

classroom dimensions hinder the physical application and exhibition of educational resources. Insufficient storage facilities may result in disorder or deterioration of precious assets. Insufficient multimedia presentation resources obstruct the integration of contemporary, interactive digital material. These infrastructure constraints ultimately undermine the quality of instruction and student participation in Social Studies classes.

Resource constraints

Limited time for lesson preparation and delivery can also be a challenge in instructional material utilisation (Smith & Johnson, 2017). Teachers may find it challenging to locate and select appropriate instructional materials and integrate them into their lessons while managing other responsibilities such as curriculum planning, assessment, and administrative tasks (Smith & Johnson, 2017). This implies that Restricted preparation time compels tutors to quickly find and choose teaching resources, frequently compromising on quality or pertinence. This difficulty is exacerbated by their additional duties, including curriculum development and evaluation, resulting in inadequate time for careful integration. As a result, teachers could depend on standard or suboptimal resources, impeding the thoroughness of Social Studies instruction. This temporal limitation undermines the ability to develop dynamic and engaging educational experiences for learners, thereby affecting overall teaching efficacy.

2.2 The Constructivist Learning Theory as an Applicable Theoretical Framework for the Study

The Constructivist Learning Theory offers a suitable framework for comprehending the obstacles and opportunities associated with the utilisation of instructional materials in Social Studies education. This theory underscores the need for active learner involvement, the construction of new knowledge from existing understandings, and contextualised learning, all of which are significantly reliant on high-quality instructional resources and effective pedagogical practices (Bruner, 1966; Piaget, 1973; Vygotsky, 1978). This section discusses the constructivist theory, its significance to the study, and its implications for policy, teacher training, and practice in Colleges of Education in Ghana. Constructivism asserts that learners actively construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through experience and reflection, rather than passively receiving information (Fosnot, 1996). Knowledge is not conveyed directly from teacher to student; rather, it is collaboratively developed within an interactive environment shaped by existing knowledge, social interactions, and real-world experiences (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1966). The ramifications of constructivism underscore that education must promote active learner involvement via experiential activities and introspection. Teachers must establish collaborative, interactive learning settings that link new knowledge to students' existing understanding and social circumstances. This method transforms the teacher's position from a source of information to a facilitator of knowledge creation, enhancing understanding and fostering critical thinking. Fundamental Principles:

- Learner-centred Approach
- Function of Instructional Materials

- Social Constructivism
- Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)
- Prior Knowledge

The implications for teaching suggest that instructional resources are fundamental, not merely ancillary, to helping learners construct meaning. These resources must be culturally relevant and closely aligned with learners' contexts to foster connection and engagement (Anani & Dzameshie, 2017; Gyebi, 2025). The utilisation of technology and manipulatives promotes engagement and deepens conceptual comprehension; nevertheless, access to technology and infrastructure continues to pose substantial issues in numerous Colleges of Education in Ghana (Opoku & Asare, 2019; Gyebi, 2025). As a result, teachers take on the role of facilitators, guiding students in exploration and discovery while adjusting their teaching methods despite limited resources (Gyebi, 2025). In Social Studies classrooms, resources such as maps, charts, digital content, and culturally relevant texts are essential tools that facilitate dynamic and collaborative knowledge construction, underscoring the need for culturally relevant and accessible instructional materials to enhance learning outcomes (Anani & Dzameshie, 2017; Gyebi, 2025).

Relevance of Constructivist Theory to the Study

The obstacles identified in the study - resource restrictions, poor technology, absence of pertinent materials, infrastructural constraints, and insufficient professional development - directly affect the implementation of constructivist concepts in Social Studies instruction. These obstacles impede tutors' ability to create learning environments where students actively construct knowledge through interaction with instructional resources (Gyebi, 2025). The constructivist theory emphasises scaffolding learners' knowledge building through tools that enhance comprehension (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976). In Social Studies, teaching materials offer tangible representations of abstract concepts such as governance, culture, and geography that might otherwise remain theoretical and disjointed. Resource limitations in Ghanaian Colleges of Education frequently compel instructors to utilise obsolete or generic materials, hindering the scaffolding process essential for constructivism (Bordoh, 2025; et al., 2018). One tutor indicated that they often "improvise" or utilise accessible resources, even when these do not meet optimal criteria, hence constraining profound learner engagement and active knowledge production (TTCE2, 2024).

Constructivist learning asserts that knowledge attains significance when linked to learners' cultural contexts and personal experiences (Gay, 2015). Participants observed a significant deficiency of educational resources that reflect the local culture and the unique heritage of Ghana's Northern Region. In the absence of culturally pertinent resources, learners find it challenging to connect the information to their own experiences, hence diminishing motivation and engagement. This deficiency directly undermines the efficacy of constructivist methodologies, as curricular resources do not align with students' settings, thereby diminishing knowledge building. Anani and Dzameshie (2017) also emphasised the challenge of connecting educational materials to local contexts, underscoring the

pressing need for culturally relevant resources that reflect students' lived experiences (Gyebi, 2025). Technology-enhanced learning closely aligns with constructivist theory by facilitating interactivity, collaboration, and the integration of multimedia content, thereby enhancing the learning experience (Hannafin & Land, 1997). The tutors' failure to successfully utilise technology - attributable to inadequate infrastructure, inconsistent electricity, and restricted internet connection in numerous Colleges of Education - constrains active learning options. Such constraints inhibit student participation, altering instructors' roles from facilitators of inquisitive, interactive learning to mere transmitters of knowledge. This scenario directly contradicts the constructivist focus on dynamic and interactive learning environments (Gyebi, 2025; Opoku & Asare, 2019). A fundamental aspect of constructivist teaching is the educator's capacity to enhance learning through the deliberate application of instructional resources and flexible teaching methods (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). The study reveals inadequate training and professional development opportunities for tutors on the proper integration of instructional materials. The lack of skills and confidence in utilising these materials impedes instructors' ability to create constructivist learning environments that foster student-centred exploration and collaboration. Tutors advocate for ongoing seminars and peer-learning platforms, indicating that improving professional development is essential for connecting pedagogical practices with constructivist principles (Gyebi, 2025).

Implications of Constructivist Theory for Study and Educational Practice

To promote meaningful learning, constructivist theory emphasises the need for readily available, varied, and culturally appropriate educational resources and technologies. Therefore, policymakers must ensure that Colleges of Education receive sufficient funding for modern resources, the development of culturally appropriate instructional aids, and investments in technology infrastructure. These measures will mitigate barriers faced by tutors, enabling more effective constructivist teaching and improving student outcomes (Bordoh, 2025 et al., 2018; Opoku & Asare, 2019). To make learning relevant and reflective of students' settings, curriculum developers should incorporate local cultural viewpoints, history, and social realities into instructional materials. These culturally sensitive materials support learners' identities and increase their involvement, which aligns with constructivist objectives of fostering deeper knowledge and relating the material to learners' experiences (Ladson-Billings, 2021). For tutors to be proficient in constructivist pedagogy and efficient use of teaching resources, ongoing professional development is essential. Training should increase tutors' capacity to adapt and improvise when resources are limited, boost their confidence when using technology, and encourage introspective, collaborative tutoring. The constructivist emphasis on teacher adaptation and expertise is supported by this continuous learning approach (TBCE1, 2024; Darling-Hammond, 2008). Enabling rich constructivist learning settings requires addressing infrastructure deficiencies, including those related to classroom space, power supply, storage, and equipment. The utilisation of technology-enhanced resources, which encourage active learning and student participation, is crucial to constructivist approaches and is facilitated by reliable electricity and internet connectivity (Opoku & Asare, 2019).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Paradigm

This research embraced an interpretivist framework. This framework is based on the conviction that reality is socially constructed and subjective, highlighting the researcher's role in understanding and elucidating participants' meanings and perspectives. The interpretivist paradigm is particularly adept at examining intricate, contextual elements, such as the difficulties faced by instructors, by facilitating an in-depth exploration of their diverse experiences and perspectives (Subrahmanyam, 2025). This framework emphasises tutors' own experiences, enabling a profound comprehension of the challenges they face in incorporating teaching resources.

3.2 Research Approach

A qualitative research methodology was employed for the investigation. This methodology harmonises perfectly with the interpretivist framework, emphasising a profound understanding of social processes from participants' perspectives rather than relying on quantitative assessment or statistical extrapolation. Qualitative research was well-suited for investigating "what challenges are encountered" as it facilitates a detailed understanding of experiences, perspectives, and the fundamental factors that shape tutors' teaching methods. This methodology allows the investigator to explore the "hows" and "whys" of the difficulties, yielding comprehensive, descriptive information (Oranga & Matere, 2023).

3.3 Research Design

The research utilised a qualitative design characterised by descriptive elements. This approach proved suitable for delivering an extensive overview of the difficulties faced by Social Studies teachers in their particular school environment. It seeks to elucidate the characteristics of these difficulties without endeavouring to determine causal linkages or extrapolate to larger demographics. The descriptive framework facilitated an in-depth investigation and clarification of the recognised difficulties, corresponding with the study's aim to "analyse the obstacles encountered by Tutors. The research's emphasis on understanding existing methodologies and challenges in a specific area (the Northern Region of Ghana) reinforces this framework.

3.4 Population

The demographic focus for this segment of the research is all Social Studies teachers in Colleges of Education located in the Northern Region of Ghana. These teachers are actively engaged in teaching the subject and are thus the foremost to encounter and manage the difficulties associated with the use of instructional materials.

3.5 Sampling Techniques

Purposive sampling was utilised to choose both the Colleges of Education and the specific Social Studies instructors. This non-probability sampling technique enables researchers to deliberately select participants who can provide comprehensive, detailed insights relevant to the study's inquiry. Colleges will be chosen based on factors such as their geographical setting (e.g., urban versus rural) to

underscore contextual differences, as well as their representation of the Colleges of Education in the Northern Region. In these designated institutions, Social Studies tutors will be deliberately selected for their expertise, eagerness to engage, and active use of instructional resources in teaching Social Studies. This guarantees that the selected participants have expertise and eloquence concerning the issues being examined.

3.6 Instruments for Data Collection

The main tools for data collection were semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, facilitated by an observation checklist. These interviews facilitated flexible discussions with tutors, allowing the researchers to explore emerging topics while ensuring that essential aspects of the problems were addressed. The unbounded format of semi-structured enquiries will prompt teachers to expand on their experiences, viewpoints, and the particular challenges they face in using teaching resources. Direct observations of Social Studies courses will yield immediate insights into the utilisation of instructional resources and the tangible difficulties teachers encounter in live classroom environments. A checklist for observation was created to systematically document instances of material utilisation, non-utilisation, improvisation, and specific difficulties noted during instructional sessions. This convergence of data (interviews and observations) will bolster the reliability and authenticity of the results.

3.7 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection commenced after obtaining all requisite ethical approvals and consent from the Colleges of Education and individual contributors. Selected teachers were invited to participate in personal semi-structured interviews at a time and place that suited their preferences. Prior to the interview, participants were apprised of the study's objectives, their entitlements (such as confidentiality and the right to withdraw), and the fact that informed consent had been obtained. Interviews were recorded audibly (with consent) and transcribed exactly for examination. The interviews examined enquiries about resource accessibility, institutional support, educational obstacles, and individual efforts. Classroom observations will take place in a chosen set of Social Studies classes taught by the tutors involved. Every class was monitored at least twice, focusing on the application of instructional materials, the factors affecting their use, and any noticeable difficulties encountered during execution. The investigators employed a predetermined checklist to ensure systematic documentation of pertinent information while also noting contextual elements and unforeseen events. The observations focused on courses addressing subjects that generally require diverse instructional resources, such as Rights and Responsibilities or Constitution and Nation Building.

3.8 Data Analysis

The gathered data underwent thematic analysis. This qualitative data analysis technique encompasses the identification, examination, and documentation of patterns (themes) present in the data. The procedure will encompass thematic analysis, beginning with immersion through reading and rereading transcribed interviews and observational notes to achieve a comprehensive grasp of the data. This was

followed by preliminary coding to derive codes from data segments outlining the difficulties encountered by instructors, and an exploration of themes by categorising analogous codes into broader topics concerning obstacles in instructional materials. The subsequent phase is evaluating themes to confirm their precise representation of the material and their uniqueness, which may require refinement, division, or amalgamation. Subsequently, topics will be delineated and designated, explicitly clarifying their meanings and offering illustrative quotations or insights, with possible themes such as "resource restrictions," "technology limitations," "insufficient training," or "contextual obstacles. Ultimately, the report will be generated by presenting the themes through detailed narratives and pertinent excerpts from interviews and observations, ensuring direct relevance to the research topic. This methodical data analysis strategy ensures that the recognised issues are thoroughly investigated and grounded in the experiences and insights gathered from the Colleges of education in Ghana's Northern Region.

4. Findings And Discussion on Challenges and Contextual Factors

This section presents findings and discussion on the research question: What challenges are being faced by Tutors of Colleges of Education in the use of instructional materials for teaching Social Studies in the Northern Region of Ghana? The theme that emerged from the study examines the challenges social studies tutors face in accessing and implementing instructional materials when teaching Social Studies at Colleges of Education. Within this theme, three distinct subthemes emerged during the interview session, providing insight into the nuanced issues tutors face in their pursuit of excellence, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1
Challenges and Contextual Factors

Challenges and Contextual Factors	1. Challenges in accessing and implementing instructional materials
	2. Challenges related to the Northern Region of Ghana's context
	3. Suggestions and improvements for integrating instructional materials

4.1 Challenges in Accessing and Implementing Instructional Materials

This subtheme emerged from tutors' responses when asked about the challenges they face in accessing or implementing instructional materials for their Social Studies classes. Their responses suggest that they grapple with multifaceted difficulties, often shaped by constraints in resources, infrastructure, and the environment. During the course of the study, when asked about challenges they face in terms of accessing or implementing instructional materials for Social Studies classes, one of the Tutors, briefly captures the essence of the challenge:

"I tell you, it is not always easy to get our hands on the materials we need. Sometimes, we have to rely on what is available, even if it is not exactly what we want. It is like trying to cook a traditional dish without all the right ingredients – you make do with what is in your kitchen." (TSVCE1, Source: Field Interview, 2024).

Teachers in Colleges of Education in Ghana's Northern Region encounter considerable obstacles in obtaining and utilising instructional resources for Social Studies. One instructor expressed, "I assure you, acquiring the necessary resources is not always straightforward. At times, we must depend on what is accessible, even if it does not precisely align with our desires. It is akin to preparing a classic recipe without the necessary components – you adapt with what you have available in your pantry."

This scenario corresponds to the product assessment phase of an evaluation framework, which is especially beneficial for comprehending how obstacles in the utilisation of instructional materials impede educational goals. Such obstacles, including insufficient funding, limited material availability, obsolete or irrelevant resources, inadequate technological infrastructure, and a lack of administrative support (Asare & Danquah, 2018), frequently compel teachers to innovate or rely on personal resources to meet their teaching requirements. Product assessment enables feedback mechanisms to guide policy modifications, resource allocation, and capacity-building efforts.

The difficulties noted align with the assertions of Bordoh, 2025 et al. (2018), who argue that "insufficient resources, such as textbooks, visual aids, and technology-integrated materials, constitute a major barrier for Colleges of Education in poor Ghana. As a result, teachers frequently rely on outdated or generic resources that may not adequately address the varied learning needs of their pupils. This ad hoc methodology, arising from resource constraints, directly obstructs the implementation of Constructivist Learning Theory. Constructivism underscores the need for active learner participation, the creation of new knowledge based on prior understanding, and learning in context, all of which depend heavily on high-calibre and culturally relevant educational materials. When teachers rely on outdated or generic resources, it obstructs the scaffolding process essential for constructivist learning, in which materials provide concrete representations of abstract ideas and relate to students' cultural backgrounds. This greatly limits deep learner involvement and dynamic knowledge creation, jeopardising the fundamental principles of constructivist teaching."

Another tutor adds depth to the discourse by highlighting the crucial need for up-to-date materials. He positioned:

"You see, the challenge we often face is the lack of up-to-date materials. Our students need to be connected with the current world, but getting those resources can be a real struggle. Internet access is not consistent here, and sometimes even basic teaching aids are hard to come by. We improvise a lot, but it is not the same as having proper resources to bring the lessons to life." (TTCE2, Source: Field Interview, 2024)

Tutors in Colleges of Education in the Northern Region of Ghana face significant challenges in accessing and implementing instructional materials for Social Studies lessons. As one tutor articulated, "I tell you, it is not always easy to get our hands on the materials we need. Sometimes, we have to rely on what is

available, even if it is not exactly what we want. It is like trying to cook a traditional dish without all the right ingredients – you make do with what is in your kitchen" (TSVCE1, Source: Field Interview, 2024).

This situation aligns with the product evaluation stage of an evaluation model, which is particularly useful for understanding how challenges in the use of instructional materials hinder the achievement of educational objectives. Such challenges, including inadequate funding, limited material supplies, outdated or irrelevant resources, lack of technological infrastructure, and insufficient administrative support (Asare & Danquah, 2018), often force tutors to improvise or rely on personal resources to meet their instructional needs. Product evaluation facilitates feedback loops to inform policy reform, resource allocation, and capacity-building initiatives.

The challenges observed are in direct consonance with Bordoh, 2025 et al. (2018), who posit that "inadequate resources, including textbooks, visual aids, and technology-enhanced materials, are found to be one of the significant challenges faced by Colleges of Education in Ghana". Many colleges struggle to secure up-to-date, diverse instructional materials that align with the Social Studies curriculum due to insufficient funds. As a result, tutors often resort to outdated or generic materials, which may not adequately address the diverse learning needs of their students (Bordoh, 2025 et al., 2018). This insight underscores the critical importance of relevant, up-to-date materials in fostering meaningful learning experiences. The lack of access to updated resources not only limits the scope of knowledge imparted but also challenges the tutors to bridge the gap creatively.

This improvisational approach, born out of severe resource limitations, directly impedes the effective application of the Constructivist Learning Theory. Constructivism emphasises active learner involvement, the construction of new knowledge from existing understandings, and contextualised learning, all of which are highly dependent on high-quality, culturally relevant instructional resources. When tutors must rely on obsolete or generic materials, this hinders the crucial scaffolding process in constructivist learning, in which materials provide tangible representations of abstract concepts such as governance, culture, and geography and connect to learners' cultural contexts and personal experiences (Gay, 2015). This significantly constrains profound learner engagement and active knowledge production, thereby undermining the core tenets of constructivist pedagogy. The implication is that students may struggle to connect abstract concepts to their lived realities, diminishing motivation and engagement and ultimately hindering their capacity to cultivate critical thinking and analytical skills vital to achieving thorough assessment results.

The dire impact of geographical and infrastructural challenges becomes evident in participants' responses as:

"The challenge is real, especially in this part of the country. The roads can be tough during the rainy season, and getting materials delivered can be a real hassle. I remember one time we were waiting for printed materials and they got stuck in a muddy road – took weeks to get them finally" (TEPCE2, Source: Field Interview, 2022):

Certainly, geographical and infrastructural barriers intensify these issues. One participant remarked, "The roads can be challenging during the wet season, and the delivery of materials can be somewhat troublesome. I recall an occasion when we awaited printed documents that became ensnared in a muddy road – it took weeks to receive them. Such pragmatic challenges, in which the actual delivery of goods is significantly hindered by adverse weather and inadequate infrastructure, directly jeopardise the timely availability of vital educational resources.

The ramifications for pedagogy and education are significant, directly challenging the tenets of Constructivist Learning Theory. Constructivism asserts that learners actively construct knowledge through engagement with meaningful, culturally relevant resources and experiences (Bruner, 1966; Piaget, 1973; Vygotsky, 1978). When resources are outdated, generic, or hampered by logistical challenges, teachers find it difficult to foster the dynamic environments essential for students to actively construct knowledge and relate it to their prior understandings and cultural backgrounds (Gay, 2015). This greatly hinders the scaffolding process vital for understanding abstract Social Studies concepts and eventually restricts students' ability to develop critical thinking and analytical skills, affecting both engagement and evaluation results.

Furthermore, one of the tutors mentioned another layer of challenges. She argued:

"Sometimes, we want to use technology, you know, projectors and such. But the power cuts, oh my! It is like a dance with the lights, on-off, on-off. You can plan a whole interactive lesson, and then poof, the lights go out, and you are back to basics." (TBCE1, Source: Field Interview, 2024).

Beyond the general scarcity of materials, technological constraints present another formidable challenge, profoundly impacting the effective utilisation of instructional resources in the Northern Region of Ghana. As one tutor vividly expressed, "Sometimes, we want to use technology, you know, projectors and such. But the power cuts, oh my! It is like a dance with the lights, on-off, on-off. You can plan a whole interactive lesson, and then poof, the lights go out, and you are back to basics" (TBCE1, Source: Field Interview, 2024). This scenario underscores the fragility of relying on technological aids in an environment plagued by inconsistent electricity supply.

This observation is directly supported by Opoku and Asare (2019), who identify inadequate access to technology and limited digital infrastructure as significant barriers to the utilisation of instructional materials in some Colleges of education. While technology-enhanced materials such as online resources, interactive platforms, and multimedia presentations are proven effective at engaging students and promoting active learning, their scarcity in Ghanaian colleges hinders tutors' ability to create dynamic, interactive learning experiences. The digital divide, exacerbated by unreliable internet connectivity and recurrent power outages, limits the potential for immersive educational experiences, particularly in rural areas.

These technological and infrastructural impediments have profound implications for teaching and learning, directly contradicting the tenets of the Constructivist Learning Theory. Constructivism

emphasises active learner involvement, the construction of new knowledge through experience, and contextualised learning, all of which are significantly enhanced by robust instructional resources and technology (Bruner, 1966; Piaget, 1973; Vygotsky, 1978). When tutors cannot reliably use digital tools or multimedia, their role is often inadvertently shifted from facilitators of inquisitive and interactive learning to mere transmitters of knowledge, inhibiting student participation and active knowledge production (Gyebi, 2025; Opoku & Asare, 2019). This prevents the creation of dynamic learning settings where technology could otherwise foster interactivity, collaboration, and deeper conceptual comprehension (Hannafin & Land, 1997).

These challenges are integral to a whole evaluation model. Examining classroom dynamics (process) clearly reveals how these technological limitations impede innovative pedagogy and student engagement, while evaluating outcomes and challenges (product) highlights critical areas requiring intervention. In a region like Northern Ghana, marked by disparities and geographical isolation, such a holistic model is crucial for understanding the systemic issues that prevent the effective integration of technology-enhanced learning.

The collective responses of tutors demonstrate remarkable resilience and determination despite these adversities. However, limited access to up-to-date materials and reliable technology severely hampers their ability to foster a comprehensive understanding of Social Studies, hindering the development of critical thinking skills and the relevance of Social Studies to students' real-world contexts. These anecdotes about power outages and the overall lack of digital resources underscore the urgent need for infrastructure improvements to ensure timely access to materials and sustained use of technology, thereby enabling more effective constructivist teaching and improving student outcomes.

4.2 Challenges related to the Colleges of Education in the Northern Region of Ghana

Furthermore, when asked about specific challenges in Ghana's Northern Region that might affect the utilisation of instructional materials in teaching Social Studies, the tutors offered insightful perspectives. Their responses highlight the complex interplay between regional context, cultural diversity, and the need for materials that reflect local narratives and experiences. A participant, a male tutor with 8 years of teaching experience, shared his perspective:

"I do not think there is any unique challenge here away from the general challenges across the country. I think it is more generic. Except that they come from different backgrounds, and some of them speak their local languages more fluently than English. So, we have to find ways to connect to make Social Studies relevant to their daily lives, which would help a lot. Aside from that, I do not see any unique challenges that are peculiar to only the northern region regarding this matter." (TTCE1 Source: Field Interview, 2024)

In addition to the overarching financial and technical constraints, teachers in Northern Ghana face unique contextual obstacles stemming from cultural diversity and the need to align teaching materials with local circumstances. One educator initially proposed that difficulties could be "generic" nationwide,

but soon emphasised the particular concern of students hailing from "diverse backgrounds" and communicating "local languages more proficiently than English," thereby requiring methods to render Social Studies "pertinent to their everyday experiences. This nuanced perspective highlights that even ostensibly global issues often exhibit distinct localised characteristics.

This claim aligns with Anani and Dzameshie (2017), who highlight that the unique contextual elements within Colleges of education in Ghana, especially in the Northern Region, pose considerable obstacles to the use of instructional materials. The fundamental problem lies in the challenge of harmonising educational resources with the local cultural milieu and learners' specific requirements when these resources lack cultural relevance or fail to reflect students' actual experiences. This cultural dissonance frequently results in student apathy and a diminished perception of significance (Anani & Dzameshie, 2017). A further professor eloquently expressed this, asserting, "We own a profound history, you understand. However, there are occasions when we lack resources that resonate with our personal narratives and experiences. It is like composing a novel with absent sections. We require resources that connect with our students and instil pride in their cultural background. This underscores a significant gap: the lack of resources that recognise and enhance local cultural stories and historical importance.

These contextual difficulties are deeply comprehended from the perspective of Constructivist Learning Theory. Constructivism asserts that learners actively build their comprehension by connecting new information to their prior knowledge, experiences, and cultural backgrounds (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1966; Gay, 2015). When educational resources lack cultural relevance and fail to represent the distinct traditions and local circumstances of Northern Ghana, they hinder students from forming meaningful connections, thereby reducing motivation and engagement. This fundamentally compromises the effectiveness of constructivist approaches, since the materials are misaligned with students' environments, hindering active knowledge construction and the cultivation of critical thinking (Gyebi, 2025; Anani & Dzameshie, 2017). Moreover, linguistic obstacles stemming from the dominance of regional languages over English necessitate considerable modifications to make Social Studies content relevant and comprehensible (Gyebi, 2024).

Implementing a comprehensive evaluation framework in this setting is especially beneficial. Analysing classroom dynamics reveals how cultural dissonance in resources affects teaching methods and student involvement, often compelling teachers to adapt in ways that may not fully meet educational objectives (Anani & Dzameshie, 2017; Nkambule, 2018). Assessing results and obstacles (product) distinctly underscores aspects requiring intervention, such as pupils' difficulties in engaging with the curriculum and fostering pride in their heritage due to "missing chapters" in their educational materials. In an area marked by heterogeneous resource allocation, geographical seclusion, and multiple socio-economic obstacles, this comprehensive framework offers an integrative perspective to analyse systemic problems and the necessary agency to close cultural divides.

The ramifications of these situational difficulties are significant. In the absence of culturally relevant and linguistically appropriate resources, students may find it challenging to recognise the significance of

Social Studies in their lives, which could affect their academic success and civic participation. It also obstructs the cultivation of a robust cultural identity and a feeling of belonging. Consequently, curriculum designers must integrate local cultural perspectives, historical contexts, and socio-economic conditions into educational resources, while policymakers must endorse the development of these culturally attuned materials (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gyebi, 2025). Furthermore, professional development initiatives should equip teachers with the competencies to adapt existing resources and innovate effectively, linking Social Studies themes to the varied cultural and linguistic contexts of students, even when resources are scarce (Gyebi, 2025).

Another participant delves into the unique historical and cultural fabric of Ghana and the Northern Region:

"We have a rich history, you see. However, sometimes, we lack resources that reflect our own stories and experiences. It is like trying to write a book with missing chapters. We need materials that resonate with our students, that make them proud of their heritage" (TSVCE2, Source: Field Interview, 2024).

In Ghana's Northern Region, teachers at Colleges of Education face significant contextual obstacles to using instructional materials in Social Studies, primarily due to a severe shortage of culturally relevant and linguistically appropriate resources. This issue transcends mere shortage; it concerns a fundamental discord between the resources at hand and the learners' distinctive socio-cultural context. Teachers underscore the significant lack of resources that reflect local cultural stories and the area's extensive history, which profoundly affects students' engagement with the curriculum and, in turn, diminishes their involvement.

One instructor expressed regret, stating, "We possess a profound heritage, you understand. However, there are occasions when we lack resources that resonate with our personal narratives and experiences. It is like composing a novel with absent sections. We require resources that connect with our students and instil pride in their cultural background. This sentiment highlights the fundamental issue: educational resources frequently neglect to incorporate the rich diversity of Ghanaian culture, resulting in a disconnect for learners. Moreover, the dominance of regional languages over English poses linguistic challenges, necessitating innovative approaches to make Social Studies relevant and comprehensible (Gyebi, 2024). These contextual elements pose a significant obstacle, especially when resources lack cultural relevance or fail to authentically represent students' local experiences (Anani & Dzameshie, 2017).

The Constructivist Learning Theory provides an essential foundation for comprehending these ramifications. Constructivism asserts that learners actively build knowledge by linking new material to their pre-existing understandings, experiences, and cultural backgrounds (Bruner, 1966; Piaget, 1973; Vygotsky, 1978). For knowledge to gain importance, it must be deeply connected to learners' cultural contexts and individual experiences (Gay, 2015). The lack of culturally relevant materials in Northern Ghana clearly contravenes this criterion. When educational resources do not align with students' environments, they find it challenging to relate the content to their personal experiences, which

decreases motivation and engagement. This shortcoming impedes tutors' ability to establish learning environments in which students engage with relevant materials to cultivate knowledge, thereby impeding the crucial "scaffolding" process necessary for constructivist education (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976). Abstract notions such as government or geography may remain theoretical and fragmented in the absence of concrete, culturally meaningful representations.

These contextual obstacles have far-reaching consequences: learners frequently struggle to engage with the curriculum, leading to reduced involvement and diminished capacity to develop critical thinking and analytical skills vital to achieving comprehensive assessment outcomes (Bordoh, 2025 et al., 2018; Gyebi, 2025). Moreover, the lack of resources that reflect local cultural narratives significantly hinders effective knowledge development, as learners find it challenging to integrate new ideas into their established cultural contexts. This shortcoming adversely affects students' perception of identity and belonging in the educational environment, as local narratives and cultural heritage are insufficiently reflected in teaching resources. As a result, teachers face an augmented responsibility, always modifying and adjusting resources - frequently insufficiently - to reconcile standardised curricula with local circumstances, so limiting deep student involvement and redirecting their efforts from teaching improvement to material development.

4.3 Suggestions and Improvements for Integrating Instructional Materials

Finally, it was imperative to inquire about the tutors' suggestions for improvement and their opinions on enhancing the integration of instructional materials into Social Studies education in Colleges of Education in the Northern Region. Their responses shed light on the critical factors that could drive positive change and innovation in the region's educational landscape. A tutor with a decade of teaching experience eloquently captured the need for continuous professional development:

"We need more workshops and training, you know? Let us learn from each other's successes and failures. It is like growing a crop – we need the right seeds, but we also need the right techniques to make them flourish." (TBCE1, Source: Field Interview, 2024).

This is in direct line with Olayinka (2016), who recommended that Social Studies tutors employ essential instructional materials in their teaching and improvise when such materials are not available. It is therefore imperative that parents, schools, and the government make important and necessary instructional materials available to Social Studies tutors to enhance teaching and, consequently, improve students' achievement in the subject. This perspective highlights the tutors' thirst for knowledge and a collaborative approach to improvement. By engaging in workshops and learning from each other's experiences, tutors can refine their instructional material utilisation techniques, ensuring a more effective and impactful teaching methodology. A tutor opined:

underscored the role of government support:

"Government support is crucial. If they could provide more resources and infrastructure, it would be a game-changer. It is like building a strong foundation for a house – you cannot have a sturdy structure without it." (TEPCE2, Source: Field Interview, 2024).

This viewpoint brings attention to the systemic challenges that need to be addressed at a broader level. Adequate resources and infrastructure are the bedrock upon which quality education stands. The availability of relevant materials, up-to-date technology, and physical infrastructure would enable tutors to unleash their potential in the classroom fully. The suggestions and improvements proposed by these tutors carry profound implications for the integration of instructional materials in Social Studies education within the Colleges of Education in the Northern Region. The call for more workshops and training reflects a proactive approach to professional development. By engaging in continuous learning, tutors can enhance their pedagogical skills, explore innovative instructional methods, and stay up to date with the latest teaching practices. The emphasis on learning from both successes and failures fosters a culture of reflection and improvement, ultimately benefiting student learning experiences.

The participant's plea for government support speaks to the structural changes necessary to transform the educational landscape. Adequate funding, resource allocation, and investment in infrastructure are fundamental to creating an environment in which instructional material utilisation can thrive. Government support can alleviate the burden on tutors, enabling them to focus on teaching rather than grappling with resource constraints. The implications extend beyond individual classrooms. These suggestions, if implemented, can elevate the overall quality of education in Ghana. Workshops and training initiatives can create a network of tutors who share best practices and collectively help raise instructional standards. Government support can lay a strong foundation for sustainable educational growth, nurturing an ecosystem in which the utilisation of instructional materials is seamless and impactful. In conclusion, the tutors' suggestions for improvements offer a blueprint for a transformed educational landscape of Ghana. The proactive approach to professional development and the advocacy for government support demonstrate a collective vision for an enriched and empowering learning environment.

Moreover, during the study, the researchers observed the challenges tutors faced in accessing and implementing instructional materials for their Social Studies classes. The challenges were many and often shaped by resource, infrastructure, and environmental constraints. Some of the tutors struggled to find relevant, up-to-date materials that reflected recent changes in the social, political, and economic spheres. Some of the textbooks were outdated, and some of the online sources were inaccessible due to poor internet connectivity or frequent power cuts. This limited the scope of knowledge imparted and challenged the tutors to bridge the gap creatively.

Also, some tutors faced difficulties obtaining or maintaining materials such as projectors, laptops, videos, maps, charts, and posters due to financial constraints and logistical problems. Some of the materials were expensive, scarce, or hard to transport. This impeded the timely availability of resources essential for effective instruction. Additionally, some tutors have difficulty using materials such as

projectors, laptops, videos, and online sources due to a lack of skills or confidence in using technology. Some of the tutors were not familiar with or comfortable with using technology in their teaching. This hindered their ability to use the materials effectively and efficiently.

Conclusion

The study revealed that teachers in Colleges of Education in Ghana's Northern Region face considerable and complex obstacles in the successful application of instructional resources for Social Studies instruction and evaluation. These difficulties mostly arise from resource constraints, such as obsolete and inadequate materials, as well as widespread technological and infrastructure limitations, such as inconsistent internet connectivity and power outages. Moreover, contextual obstacles such as a lack of culturally relevant and linguistically appropriate resources, coupled with insufficient professional development opportunities, impede student engagement and the successful implementation of constructivist educational approaches. These challenges collectively hinder the depth of knowledge imparted, impede the cultivation of critical thinking skills, and undermine the equity and effectiveness of evaluation procedures. To address these challenges and improve educational outcomes, the research emphasises the critical need for augmented government assistance in resource distribution and infrastructure enhancement, ongoing professional development initiatives centred on integrating instructional materials, and the proactive creation of culturally attuned resources that align with local contexts.

Recommendations

The study recommended that, to adequately address the complex issues encountered by teachers in Colleges of Education in Ghana's Northern Region regarding Social Studies teaching resources, governmental and educational bodies need to adopt a holistic approach. This approach necessitates a substantial increase in financial resources to procure contemporary, culturally relevant, and linguistically appropriate educational materials that reflect local stories and experiences, thereby improving student engagement and understanding. Simultaneously, substantial investment in technological infrastructure, encompassing dependable internet access and power supply, is essential for the efficient use of digital tools and interactive learning platforms. Ultimately, coherent and focused professional development initiatives are crucial for empowering tutors with the pedagogical expertise and confidence necessary to effectively incorporate diverse instructional resources, tailor materials to local circumstances, and utilise technology to support engaging teaching and learning experiences.

Limitations of the study

The descriptive research design of the study presents a drawback, as it clarifies the attributes of the challenges encountered by instructors without establishing causal relationships. Moreover, the results pertain exclusively to the Northern Region of Ghana and cannot be generalised to broader populations.

Declarations

Author contributions: All authors prepared and reviewed the manuscript.

Data availability: The data sets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request

Ethics approval and consent to participate. The University of Education, Winneba Research Ethics Committee waived ethical review and approval for the study, as the anonymity of the interviewees ensured that no sensitive data was collected. All data collection procedures were conducted in accordance with the UEW Declaration on Ethics. Informed consent was sought from all participants (respondents) in the study. They were informed that the survey was anonymous and that participation was voluntary.

Consent to publish: Additional informed consent was obtained from all individual participants for whom identifying information is included in this article.

Funding: No funding was received to assist with preparing this manuscript.

Competing interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests

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