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Utilisation of Instructional Materials on Perceived Academic Performance and Learning Experiences in Social Studies Concepts

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Abstract

This research examined how educational resources influence students' academic achievement and learning experiences in Social Studies at Colleges of Education in Northern Ghana. Using a qualitative, exploratory case study within an interpretivist paradigm, the study sought to understand this phenomenon in depth. The intended demographic included Social Studies instructors from four Colleges of Education in the area. The study intentionally selected eight tutors based on their knowledge and experience. Data were gathered via semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. The research indicated that intentionally using diverse educational materials, such as visual aids, multimedia, narratives, and excursions, significantly changed Social Studies instruction. These resources markedly improved student participation, comprehension, and enthusiasm, promoting active engagement and analytical reasoning. Pupils indicated a transformation from viewing Social Studies as 'tedious' to considering it 'relevant and pleasurable', evolving from simple test readiness to authentic engagement with the material. The research found that educational materials are crucial to improving academic performance and learning experiences, fostering constructive and deep engagement with Social Studies principles. Suggestions include ensuring the systematic provision and availability of varied resources, providing extensive professional training for educators, and encouraging the creation of culturally relevant instructional materials to enhance student engagement.

Introduction

Instructional materials are essential for improving Social Studies instruction in Colleges of Education. They facilitate communication in teaching by enhancing comprehension, engaging learners, and clarifying complex concepts. These materials support diverse learning styles. This allows students of different aptitudes and backgrounds to engage with the subject (Howard & Brady, 2018). Research shows that using instructional resources enhances student engagement, comprehension, and motivation. This promotes active participation and critical thinking. Effective use of materials is vital given Social Studies' role in Ghana's curriculum. This study evaluated how instructional materials affect perceived academic performance and learning experiences in Social Studies at Colleges of Education in Northern Ghana.

This study used an exploratory case study and qualitative methods to examine how instructional materials affect teaching and learning. It addresses a gap in the literature on Social Studies instruction and the impact of materials on academic performance in Northern Ghana. The study collected data through semi-structured interviews, observations, and institutional documents. The study involved Social Studies tutors from four deliberately selected Colleges of Education. Findings showed consensus that selecting materials well benefits comprehension and student outcomes. Tutor feedback showed that adding visual aids, multimedia, storytelling, and field trips to lessons increased interest and understanding. The study found that instructional resources are essential to better academic performance and effective teaching-learning environments.

Instructional materials are widely recognised as essential to effective teaching, across disciplines and nations (McGee et al., 1995; Graham, 2019). In both developed and developing countries, resources such as traditional textbooks, visual aids, multimedia, and digital platforms are crucial for enhancing comprehension, engaging student interest, and clarifying complex concepts, thus facilitating effective learning experiences (Boateng et al., 2024). The global trend underscores the need for diverse resources to accommodate different learning styles and promote active participation and critical thinking (Howard & Brady, 2018; Vong & Kaewurai, 2017). Global educational frameworks emphasise the importance of integrating culturally inclusive learning materials to enhance content relatability and significance for students (Gay, 2015). Despite this global consensus, disparities in resource availability, teacher training, and institutional support create significant variation in how instructional materials are used, ultimately leading to uneven educational outcomes.

The effective use of instructional materials in Africa faces distinct challenges. Materials connect abstract concepts to practical understanding, but resource scarcity, infrastructure limitations (such as unreliable electricity or internet access), and limited professional development often hinder progress. Research shows materials improve instruction (Okobia, 2012; Nantwi, 2015), yet practices and resources differ among institutions. Many systems struggle to move beyond basic resources and fully use modern tools. These tools are crucial for developing students' critical thinking and civic engagement. Providing core, culturally relevant resources remains vital to motivate students in tough educational environments.

Instructional materials are essential for improving Social Studies instruction in Colleges of Education (Okobia, 2012; Nantwi, 2015). This subject is central to the curriculum in Ghanaian Colleges of Education (Bordoh, Bassaw & Eshun, 2013; Nyantakyi, Bordoh, Anim & Brew, 2020). Its effective delivery is important. Social Studies is multidisciplinary. It covers history, geography, economics, civics, and sociology. Its goal is to give students a full grasp of their society, culture, history, and the world. The subject aims to develop informed decision-making and inspire community participation (Bordoh, Bassaw & Eshun, 2013; Nyantakyi et al., 2020; Russell & Waters, 2021). Using varied instructional materials is key to these aims. This inclusion addresses different learning styles and supports meaningful engagement for diverse students (Howard & Brady, 2018). It also encourages active participation and critical thinking (Vong & Kaewurai, 2017).

Despite their key role in teaching (McGee et al., 1995; Graham, 2019), instructional materials face implementation challenges. The national curriculum provides guidelines, but tutor training, access to resources, and support shape practice. Social Studies instruction and material use in Northern Ghana vary across institutions (Debrah et al., 2021; Aheto-Domi, Issah & Dorleku, 2020). This raises concerns over educational quality and student benefits. Research on Social Studies instruction in Northern Ghana Colleges of Education remains limited. Few studies examine how materials affect student performance and experiences. The lack of local evidence makes it hard to identify best practices and strategies. This gap hampers the optimisation of materials and the improvement of outcomes in this region.

Against this backdrop, this study aims to assess tutors' use of instructional materials in teaching Social Studies in Colleges of Education in the Northern Region of Ghana, with a view to providing insights for improving teaching and learning outcomes. This study assesses tutors' utilisation of instructional materials in teaching Social Studies in Colleges of Education in the Northern Region of Ghana. The study aims to address the research question: How does the utilisation of instructional materials impact perceived academic performance and learning experiences in Social Studies at the Colleges of Education in the Northern Region of Ghana?

Theoretical Contribution

This research makes a notable theoretical contribution by drawing on and extending established educational frameworks to examine how Colleges of Education in Northern Ghana use instructional resources in Social Studies pedagogy. At the core of the study's theoretical framework is Daniel Stufflebeam's (2000) Context, Input, Process, Product (CIPP) evaluation model, widely regarded as a comprehensive framework for evaluating educational initiatives. Instead of applying the paradigm broadly, this study highlights the Process element, concentrating on educators' actual utilisation of instructional resources in the classroom to influence student learning. This application moves beyond conventional outcome-oriented evaluation to a more formative, comprehensive examination of the educational milieu. It recognises that instructional resources alone are insufficient unless educators genuinely and effectively incorporate them into teaching practices to promote active learning, critical thinking, and student involvement. This nuanced emphasis reveals the dynamic mechanisms that shape real-time education, deepening understanding of the factors that directly influence students' academic success and learning experiences in Social Studies.

The research's theoretical contribution enhances the link between the CIPP assessment framework and prominent educational learning theories, particularly Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning and Bruner's Constructivist theory. These theories assert that significant learning occurs when learners actively engage with material through diverse sensory and cognitive pathways, generating knowledge through interaction with their educational surroundings. Although constructivist paradigms have historically endorsed using instructional resources to support active knowledge creation, this research advances the discipline by situating these resources within a culturally attuned, contextually relevant educational framework. It shows that when instructional resources are used strategically, they support cognitive functions by contextualising abstract Social Studies ideas while boosting motivation and understanding by accommodating students' diverse learning styles. Consequently, the study enhances and broadens constructivist theory by emphasising that educational resources should move beyond generic use and align with students' cultural contexts for learning to be meaningful and impactful. This underscores the connection between cognitive and cultural aspects of learning, representing a significant theoretical advancement that places knowledge creation within learners' social and cultural contexts, especially in the varied environments of Northern Ghana.

A key theoretical progression in this research combines Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) tenets with assessment and instructional frameworks. Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), which acknowledges and values students' cultural backgrounds, identities, and experiences, is increasingly promoted as vital for achieving equitable education. Widely regarded as an educational philosophy that prioritises inclusivity and respect, this research links CRT to instructional resources as effective tools for implementing its tenets. The study suggests that culturally enriched educational resources, such as regional illustrations, folklore, artefacts, and native languages, serve as conduits that connect students to the subject while validating their identities and personal histories. This approach shifts the educational perspective from a culture-agnostic or uniform approach to one that actively promotes diversity and inclusion in the social studies curriculum. This research thus prompts current models to recognise culture as a crucial element in educational design and implementation, emphasising that learners achieve better outcomes when cultural resources are recognised and included in their education. This theoretical connection offers new perspectives on using instructional resources to deepen cognitive engagement while also promoting belonging, motivation, and equity in educational practices.

Furthermore, the research addresses a crucial theory-practice gap by empirically showing how culturally responsive, diverse teaching resources change classroom interactions. Instructors' assessments and learner responses indicate a notable shift from passive, mechanical memorisation to dynamic, inquiry-driven learning characterised by critical inquiry and strong engagement. This strongly aligns with constructivist principles while emphasising the essential role of culturally relevant resources in making abstract Social Studies themes comprehensible and relatable. Students' shift from viewing the subject as "tedious" to finding it "relevant and pleasurable" supports the notion that educational resources catalyse both cognitive and emotional involvement. This provides tangible empirical evidence for the theoretical assertion that implementation quality, as emphasised in CIPP Process evaluation, is crucial to achieving educational objectives. The research shows how culturally pertinent materials ignite curiosity, promote critical thinking, and inspire students beyond simple test readiness, enriching the theoretical understanding of instructional resources as active facilitators of transformative education, particularly in diverse cultural classrooms.

The theoretical contributions encompass not only personal learning but also the social and democratic aspects of education, which are fundamental to Social Studies as a field. The research shows that educational resources help students connect theoretical concepts to practical applications shaped by their cultural backgrounds, highlighting how teaching methods can help learners engage critically and actively in society. This aligns with the democratic objectives of Social Studies education, specifically promoting informed decision-making and civic engagement. The research emphasises that culturally diverse educational resources enhance not only academic competencies like critical analysis and writing proficiency but also cultivate students' identities and civic engagement. This conceptual connection positions educational resources as essential not only for intellectual growth but also for fostering well-rounded, socially conscious people ready to confront modern social and political challenges. Consequently, the results strengthen existing educational theory by clarifying the role of culturally

responsive resources in fulfilling education's broader societal purposes across culturally varied settings such as Northern Ghana.

Ultimately, this research advances theoretical discussions on educational resource fairness and professional growth by identifying institutional factors that affect how effectively educators use instructional resources. It underscores that educator training, resource accessibility, and sustained institutional support are essential to successfully integrating materials. This highlights a key systemic aspect that requires policy and management focus beyond educational factors. Integrating the assessment framework with culturally attuned pedagogy compels educational institutions to view socio-cultural, infrastructural, and professional environments as interconnected factors that influence teaching effectiveness and learning outcomes. This holistic viewpoint strengthens the theoretical framework by situating education within a multifaceted ecosystem in which resources, instructor proficiency, and cultural significance jointly shape efficacy. Thus, the study's theoretical contribution is twofold: it advances pedagogical theory while also providing actionable policy insights that can inform future research and educational reforms focused on maximising the use of instructional materials in culturally diverse, resource-limited environments.

In conclusion, the research advances educational theory by merging the Process element of the CIPP evaluation model with constructivist and culturally responsive teaching frameworks, offering deeply contextualised insight into how instructional materials are used in Social Studies education. It shifts the conversation from resources as mere information delivery mechanisms to dynamic, culturally ingrained agents that enhance learning contexts. The study highlights the importance of cultural context, proactive implementation, and structural support in fulfilling the democratic and intellectual aims of Social Studies education, particularly in the culturally diverse and resource-limited context of Northern Ghana. This conceptual amalgamation and expansion provide a strong foundation for future enquiries and practical measures to improve educational quality and equity through culturally attuned instructional resources.

Utilisation of Instructional Materials on Perceived Academic Performance and Learning Experiences

Perception of Instructional Material Influence on Student Academic Performance and Experience

A variety of educational resources is an essential component of improving the teaching and learning experience, particularly in disciplines like Social Studies. The literature provides a strong theoretical foundation, largely grounded in constructivist and learner-centred teaching methods, which posits that educational resources are essential for fostering active, critical, and engaged learning. This perspective emphasises the importance of students actively constructing knowledge through meaningful engagement with their learning environment, shifting from passive absorption to active involvement.

In Northern Ghana, this framework is especially pertinent because of several structural factors: students' varied cultural heritages, the interdisciplinary nature of Social Studies, and the resource constraints faced by teacher training institutions in the area. These elements create a distinctive environment where educational resources not only facilitate learning but also connect theoretical social ideas to students' personal experiences and cultural identities. The intricate educational landscape in Northern Ghana requires connections beyond conventional teaching approaches, which often fail to engage pupils or link the curriculum effectively to their social surroundings. Consequently, investigating the use of instructional materials in this context is not merely pertinent but essential to improving teaching methods and educational outcomes in teacher training.

A key area of inquiry examines how these resources build comprehension and improve educational outcomes. Studies show that educational resources are vital tools for connecting theoretical ideas to concrete understanding, a process crucial to meeting diverse learning needs. Integrating authentic primary sources, such as historical documents and artefacts, enriches students' understanding of historical events and promotes critical assessment of diverse viewpoints, as Turner & Patel (2017) note. This approach fosters analytical historical reasoning by enabling students to investigate history and evaluate evidence. Integrating visual tools, such as maps, graphs, and photographs, alongside audio-visual resources improves comprehension of abstract ideas and creates a vital link between historical contexts and modern realities. This suggests that educational resources are vital for turning theoretical ideas into tangible understanding and meeting diverse learning needs. Integrating authentic primary sources, including historical documents, with visual aids improves critical historical analysis, supports evidence assessment, and strengthens the link between historical events and contemporary life. Using a variety of sensory-rich materials is crucial for enhancing understanding, promoting analytical questioning, and improving educational success in Social Studies.

Beyond cognitive outcomes, educational resources significantly influence the qualitative aspects of the student experience, particularly engagement and motivation. A study conducted by Suzuki & Tanaka (2018) reveals that incorporating technology, including interactive maps and virtual tours, correlates with increased student motivation. Role-playing simulations strengthen students' empathy and perspective-taking, while storytelling and Narratives deepen the cultural aspects of the educational experience. The shift from passive listening to active engagement, supported by diverse resources, transforms classroom dynamics, fosters critical thinking, and encourages students to move beyond mere memorisation, leading to a more positive disposition towards the subject.

Scholarly work supports the deliberate use of educational resources aligned with the tenets of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT). Gay (2015) emphasises that Critical Race Theory prioritises acknowledging pupils' diverse cultural backgrounds, identities, and experiences. Instructional resources that integrate realia, regional illustrations, artefacts, and stories help to close cultural divides, making the content relevant and meaningful for every student. In Northern Ghana, with its vibrant cultural diversity and unique social experiences, this relatability is essential to fostering students' innate curiosity, cultivating a sense of identity, and promoting intellectual inquiry beyond mere exam readiness. Studies consistently

show that carefully selecting and incorporating materials supports students' overall growth by enhancing academic achievement, promoting critical analysis, and nurturing lasting learning practices. This supports the idea that educational resources are vital in Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) because they use local illustrations and real-world objects to validate students' varied origins and address cultural inequalities. This approach builds relatability, innate curiosity, and analytical reasoning, leading to broader growth and academic achievement beyond simple test readiness.

Differences in Engagement and Understanding with and Without Instructional Materials

The influence of educational resources on student learning is clearly evident when comparing classroom interactions and cognitive outcomes with and without their use. This phenomenon is especially pronounced at the intersection of Northern Ghana, the Social Studies field, and the teacher training college milieu, an amalgamation characterised by specific structural dynamics that warrant further examination. Northern Ghana, marked by diverse cultural heritages, varying access to resources, and infrastructural obstacles, offers a setting where conventional teaching methods may fall short of meeting students' needs. Because of its interdisciplinary and community-oriented nature, Social Studies requires teaching strategies that connect theoretical ideas to students' real-life experiences and foster civic participation. Teacher training institutions in this area are crucial for developing future educators who can address these challenges, making the use of instructional materials both intriguing and vital.

The theoretical discussion suggests that incorporating varied resources profoundly alters the classroom's cognitive framework, shifting it from a conventional, passive setting to one defined by dynamic, interactive dialogue (Bakar, 2021; Benade, 2020). Without educational resources, learning often relies on printed materials, textbooks, and lectures, limiting participation to shallow comprehension or memorisation (Chisunum & Nwadiokwu, 2024). This approach underutilises students' innate curiosity and limits teachers' ability to connect theoretical ideas to real-world scenarios. Learners in these settings often adopt a passive stance toward rote memorisation and adherence, rather than comprehensive, critical evaluation. Thus, educational resources can shift learning from passive lectures to active involvement, helping students move beyond memorisation to critical evaluation and interaction. Without them, education remains cursory, obscuring the link between theory and real-world application and stifling curiosity-driven inquiry.

Incorporating varied educational resources, including graphics, stories, films, and interactive tools, is a crucial driver of transformation (Lu & Hanim, 2024; Chisunum & Nwadiokwu, 2024). These resources drive significant educational transformation, moving students from mere compliance to inquiry-based exploration. This shift aligns with constructivist tenets, emphasising that learners actively generate knowledge through meaningful engagement with their learning environments. Research consistently shows that resources boost engagement, shifting classroom interactions from one-sided lectures to authentic dialogue marked by increased student involvement, inquiry, and discussion (Wood, Galloway,

Sinclair, & Hardy, 2018). This shows that educational resources are vital tools for increasing student involvement and shifting the learning atmosphere from passive absorption to active, interactive discourse. They align with constructivist principles, encouraging inquiry-driven curiosity and enabling deeper knowledge development through concrete, accessible illustrations of abstract ideas.

Instructional resources are crucial for strengthening cognitive comprehension, as they promote knowledge assimilation over rote memorisation (Castro-Alonso, de Koning, Fiorella, & Paas, 2021). Resources such as maps and historical visuals provide multiple access points and varied learning modalities, promoting comprehension of intricate ideas and increasing the topic's relevance. This is especially vital in Northern Ghana, where students often come from diverse cultural backgrounds and educational resources may be scarce, making relatable, accessible materials essential. A research investigation indicated that increased involvement promotes faster understanding of intricate ideas and improves critical thinking skills in pupils (Sabri, Ismail, Annuar, Rahman, Abd Hamid, & Abd Mutalib, 2024). The enhanced understanding educational resources provide goes beyond simple academic improvement, fostering intellectual inquiry that deepens comprehension and builds vital critical-thinking and problem-solving skills for an evolving landscape. This disparity underscores the need for instructional materials as essential tools to strengthen student capabilities and build lasting learning habits, a crucial element for effective Social Studies education and teacher-training initiatives in Northern Ghana's unique socio-educational context.

Student Feedback and Observations Regarding Instructional Material Use

Direct student comments and observations strongly support the effectiveness of educational resources, showing a marked and positive shift in learning perspectives and engagement (Martin, Wang, & Sadaf, 2018). Student evaluations indicate that intentionally integrating varied teaching materials improves the learning environment, promoting genuine intellectual engagement and excitement rather than mere academic compliance and memorisation (Chisunum & Nwadiokwu, 2024; Javed, 2023). This suggests that educational resources shift students' views from seeing the subject as "tedious" to seeing it as "pleasurable and relevant," promoting genuine involvement. This shift moves pupils beyond mere memorisation and adherence to academic standards, fostering critical thinking and authentic engagement with the material.

Studies reveal a notable shift in students' views on topics often deemed dull (Imafuku, Saiki, Kawakami, & Suzuki, 2015). Captivating teaching methods, such as narrative techniques, collaborative dialogues, and interactive materials, significantly boost student engagement and excitement. The shift from apathy to active involvement is a notable outcome, underscoring resources' ability to foster positive attitudes and perspectives toward Social Studies. This revitalised enthusiasm is significant and closely linked to educational ideals that encourage active participation and critical involvement. This suggests that integrating stimulating educational resources is crucial to shifting student attitudes from indifference to

excitement in areas like Social Studies, aligning pedagogy with the tenets of active learning and critical engagement. This shift significantly boosts student interest, enthusiasm, and involvement, leading to improved comprehension and strong educational outcomes.

Furthermore, student evaluations suggest that educational resources foster deeper, more meaningful engagement with the content (van Dulmen, Visser, Pepin, & McKenney, 2023; Chisunum & Nwadiokwu, 2024). When materials are characterised as "accessible and pleasurable," students transition their attention from simply "passing assessments" to "engaging with the material. This perspective emphasises the considerable influence of well-designed resources on shaping perceptions and nurturing intrinsic drive. Integrating culturally pertinent materials, such as local illustrations, tangible items, and folk tunes, is crucial because it links theoretical abstractions to students' experiences and cultural backgrounds. This relatability fosters ownership, connection, and identity, thereby intensifying engagement and facilitating the internalisation of content.

This focus is especially vital in Northern Ghana, where Colleges of Education serve as essential institutions for training Social Studies educators who shape educational methodologies across the region. Northern Ghana's structural dynamics, including varying resource availability, heterogeneous student demographics, and specific cultural contexts, create a unique educational landscape that warrants examination. Social Studies, a multifaceted discipline that includes history, geography, economics, civics, and sociology, is well suited to address these intricacies yet remains insufficiently explored in this region. Teacher education institutions in Northern Ghana are a crucial locus where instructional resources can significantly enhance teaching efficacy and student performance, mitigate inequalities, and promote culturally pertinent teaching methods. Exploring this intersection not only addresses a crucial gap but also guides customised approaches to improve educational outcomes and learning experiences in a region characterised by distinct socio-economic and cultural elements.

Increased engagement with instructional resources also shows up in observable constructive learning behaviours (Wang, 2017). Research shows that students show greater enthusiasm for participating in research and educational activities beyond the mandated curriculum, suggesting the cultivation of lasting learning practices and intellectual curiosity (Culver, Braxton, J., & Pascarella, 2019). The materials effectively captivate students, fostering enthusiasm that leads to active learning outcomes: students articulate viewpoints, pose incisive enquiries, participate in discussions, and share experiences. This engagement affirms the materials' purpose: harmonising educational approaches with constructivist and learner-focused methods and emphasising the student's contribution to the active formation of knowledge. In summary, educational resources are vital for student empowerment. They are instrumental in cultivating an affirmative, driven educational journey by transforming theoretical material into an accessible, enjoyable experience of discovery. This shift fosters deeper understanding and strengthens analytical abilities, teamwork, and a dedication to inquiry vital to scholarly success and lasting achievement. The effectiveness demonstrated through student experiences provides strong empirical support for emphasising the availability and strategic incorporation of varied instructional resources in education. This integration situates the study within the structural and cultural contexts of

Northern Ghana. It underscores the unique significance of Social Studies teacher education colleges as settings, reinforcing the theoretical justification for this inquiry.

Methodology

Research Approach and Design

This research focuses on how Social Studies educators in Colleges of Education in Ghana's Northern Region use teaching resources. This confined system has a defined geographic area (the Northern Region), a distinct institutional framework (Colleges of Education), and a targeted cohort (Social Studies tutors). The research investigates how these educators use instructional materials in their actual teaching contexts, incorporating institutional, geographic, and curricular aspects.

The researchers justify an exploratory case study approach within an interpretivist framework, as it suits comprehensive investigation and the intricate depiction of multifaceted, context-specific phenomena. Unlike other qualitative methodologies such as phenomenology, which aims to understand lived experiences, or basic qualitative inquiry, which offers a general overview without specific contextual emphasis, an exploratory case study enables an in-depth analysis of the nuances of instructional materials utilisation within its real educational context. This design encapsulates the intricate dynamics among educators, resources, curricular requirements, and contextual elements that affect students' academic outcomes and learning journeys. It allows researchers to maintain a comprehensive viewpoint, considering both personal and organisational aspects, in line with Yin's (2018) characterisation of a case study as a thorough examination of a phenomenon within its actual environment.

The interpretivist framework supports this design by recognising the subjective and diverse realities educators and learners construct, prioritising understanding over generalisation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This amalgamation supports the researchers' methodological choices to explore the use and experience of instructional materials within a specific educational and cultural context, yielding insights relevant to practice and policy in the Northern Ghanaian Colleges of Education.

Population of the Study

The study population consisted of all tutors and students from the various colleges of education in the Northern Region. However, the study's target population was limited to Social Studies tutors at various colleges of education in the Northern Region. The study selected eight Social Studies tutors from four Colleges of Education in the Northern Region of Ghana due to their expertise and experience, which are essential for a comprehensive examination of instructional material utilisation, as well as forty (40) students, ten (10) students from each college.

The following pseudonyms were used to represent participants and their responses in the study;

< TBCE represents tutors from Bagabaga College of Education > TBCE1, TBCE2,

< TTCE represents tutors from Tamale College of Education > TTCE1, TTCE2.

< TEPCE represents tutors from EP College of Education > TEPEC1, TEPEC2.

< TSVCE represents tutors from St Vincent College of Education. > TSVCE1, TSVCE2.

Table 1
Participant (tutors) Demographic Information

Participants	Males	Females	Total
TBCE	1	1	2
TTCE	2	0	2
TEPCE	1	1	2
TSVCE	2	0	2
TOTAL	6	2	8

Table 2
Participant (students) Demographic Information

Participants (students)	Number	Total
TBCE	10	10
TTCE	10	10
TEPCE	10	10
TSVCE	10	10
TOTAL	40	40

Source: **Fieldwork, 2024**

The demographic information of the study participants is summarised in Tables 1 and 2 provided above. Out of the 8 participants, 2 of them were sampled from Bagabaga College of Education with (1) male and (1) female, 2 participants from Tamale College of Education with (2) males and (0) females, 2 participants from EP College of Education with (1) male and (1) female, and finally 2 participants from St Vincent College of Education with (2) males and (0) females. Also, ten (10) students were selected from each of the colleges

Sampling Technique

The researchers sampled eight (8) Social Studies tutors and forty (40) students from the four selected Colleges of Education in the Northern Region of Ghana. The researchers selected two (2) from Bagabaga College of Education, two (2) from St Vincent College of Education, two (2) from E. P. College of Education, and two (2) from Tamale College of Education using purposive sampling. Tulin (2019) advises researchers that, when adopting this sampling method, they should select a sample based on knowledge of the population, its elements, and the study's purpose. This range is widely recommended in qualitative educational research because it balances diverse perspectives with manageable discussion dynamics (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Ten students allow rich interaction that fosters in-depth exploration of their perceptions and experiences while keeping the environment manageable so all participants can contribute meaningfully without feeling overwhelmed. The focus group should include students actively enrolled in Social Studies courses, as they directly experience the instructional materials under study. Selection criteria could include diversity in academic performance, gender, and cultural backgrounds to capture a broad spectrum of views and learning experiences, consistent with the study's emphasis on culturally responsive teaching and varied learning styles (Gay, 2015; Howard & Brady, 2018). Additionally, selecting students who have used these instructional materials allows the discussion to focus specifically on their impact on learning and engagement.

The researchers employed purposive sampling because, according to Boateng (2016), it selects respondents with ideas, knowledge, expertise, and experience relevant to the phenomenon under study. Based on this explanation, the researchers sampled only Social Studies tutors because they are the primary implementers of the Social Studies teaching curriculum at the College of Education level and are in a position to provide the best responses. While purposive sampling may limit the generalizability of the findings to a broader population, it aligns well with the qualitative nature of this research, which aims for in-depth exploration rather than broad representation (Etikan et al., 2016). Moreover, including Social Studies tutors from all four Colleges of Education in the Northern Region of Ghana ensured diverse perspectives, as each institution may have unique contexts and practices that influence how instructional materials are used. In this context, Social Studies students familiar with instructional materials can provide insightful feedback on their academic performance and learning experiences. Purposive sampling, particularly maximum variation sampling, is a suitable method for selecting 10 students from each college, as it ensures representation of diverse viewpoints based on factors such as academic achievement, gender, and cultural heritage (Boateng, 2016; Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). This methodology aligns with qualitative research objectives that emphasise depth and contextual understanding over generalisability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Selecting ten students from each institution for focus groups is optimal, as this number balances diversity and feasibility, enabling deep, meaningful dialogue while ensuring every participant can engage actively (Krueger & Casey, 2015; Tulin, 2019). This approach captures diverse student interactions with educational resources and supports a comprehensive investigation aligned with the research objectives.

Data Collection and Analysis

This study used two primary instruments: an interview guide and an observation protocol. The researchers conducted the interview based solely on the interview guide they prepared and printed; however, they allowed follow-up questions as they arose during the interview. The researchers held focus group discussions with the students. The entire data collection process took the researchers five working days, including the interviews and observations conducted at the selected Colleges of Education. The process began on 16 June 2024 at Bagabaga College of Education in Tamale and ended on 20 June 2024 at St Vincent College of Education in Yendi. Simultaneously, the researchers requested and collected relevant documents such as the Colleges of Education Social Studies Programme Handbook, institutional policies and guidelines for teaching Social Studies, and the Social Studies curriculum for Colleges of Education (2019) from the tutors, the college administration, and the Social Studies department, ensuring proper permissions and ethical considerations were observed.

This study used thematic analysis to examine qualitative data from interview transcripts and observation notes. Thematic analysis is suitable for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes within qualitative data, aligning with this study's research objective. The process involved familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. We transcribed and systematically coded interview data and classroom observations to identify recurring ideas and experiences related to the use of instructional materials. We mapped these themes against the research question to provide a deeper conceptualisation of instructional materials in colleges of education in northern Ghana. This method helped uncover contextual insights and support meaningful interpretations of participant experiences.

Findings

This section presents findings on the research question: How does the utilisation of instructional materials affect perceived academic performance and learning experiences in Social Studies in the Colleges of Education in the Northern Region of Ghana? The influence of instructional materials on students' learning emerged as a central theme, along with sub-themes on instructional materials' impact on perceived academic performance and learning experiences. 2. Differences in engagement and understanding with and without instructional materials. 3. Student feedback and observations regarding instructional material use.

Student learning effects include three subthemes. Participants reflected on how instructional materials affected perceived academic performance and overall learning experiences. Their perspectives showed consensus that well-chosen materials positively influence comprehension and student outcomes. Observed differences in student engagement and understanding when instructional materials were used versus when they were not formed another subtheme. Participants noted heightened interest and increased comprehension, underscoring instructional materials' role in fostering active learning. Participants also shared insights from student feedback and observations on the use of instructional materials. This subtheme emphasised the importance of students' voices in assessing the effectiveness of material integration and pointed towards the potential for ongoing refinement.

Influence on Student Learning

The ultimate goal of any education curriculum is to empower students with knowledge, critical thinking skills, and the ability to connect their learning to the world around them. Within this framework, instructional materials play a pivotal role in the teaching process. This study explored the profound effects of instructional materials on perceived academic performance, engagement, and the overall learning experience in Social Studies education. By exploring subthemes on perceptions of instructional materials' impact, differences in student engagement, and insights from student feedback, the study revealed a comprehensive picture of instructional materials' transformational effects on student learning. These narratives not only validate our pedagogical choices but also guide us toward effective strategies for enhancing teaching practices.

Perception of Instructional Material Influence on Student Academic Performance and Experience

Instructional materials significantly transform the cognitive framework of learning, shifting students from passive recipients to active participants. This transition improves understanding by linking abstract concepts to practical applications and concrete experiences. The focus shifts from rote memorisation to critical thinking and curiosity-driven exploration. Instructional materials, including visuals, narratives, and interactive resources, encourage active participation and inquiry-based learning in the classroom. Tutors noted that this engagement built skills beyond content knowledge, including critical thinking, communication, and collaboration. These materials address diverse student needs, bridge gaps across varied backgrounds, and support differentiated instruction. This improves academic performance and fosters a positive attitude toward the subject, helping students see it as relatable and enjoyable rather than merely a way to pass exams. The materials also encourage students to pursue research and learning beyond curricular requirements, promoting intellectual exploration and lifelong learning habits.

A tutor shared:

"Selecting instructional materials can effectively engage students. This effect resembles students exploring beyond textbooks, indicating that the materials foster discovery and curiosity often absent in conventional curriculum resources. Using appropriate Teaching/Learning Materials (TLMs) significantly enhances students' comprehension. This improved understanding builds students' confidence during examinations. The tutor notes that these instructional materials seem to expand cognitive skills and, importantly, connect theoretical concepts to practical applications. The positive impact of this engagement and understanding is evident in students' grades, as deeper learning is reflected in their academic performance" (TBCE2, Field Interview, 2024).

Another tutor observed:

"Students originate from diverse backgrounds, and instructional materials function to 'bridge the gap' created by these varied experiences. When I introduce realia, such as artefacts and stories, the classroom

environment and subject matter become more engaging for students. These materials enhance engagement because they show students they can relate to the content. Moreover, they promote higher engagement, as students ask more questions and participate more in class discussions. This increased engagement positively affects perceived academic performance, leading to more thoughtful essays and better presentations. For most students, these instructional materials significantly influence their learning journey" (TEPCE1, Field Interview, 2024).

A participant described the use of instructional materials as enlightening, stating, "The materials provide students with something tangible to engage with." The tutor shared that they employed audio-visual materials, including historical documents and traditional songs, during Social Studies lessons. This approach helped students develop critical thinking skills and effectively connect historical contexts to contemporary experiences. The tutor also noted that students showed pride when they shared these connections. Using materials this way went beyond academics, fostering a sense of identity and understanding of students' environment (TSVCE2, field interview, 2024).

Students in focus group discussions affirmed the tutors' insights, emphasising that educational resources greatly improved their learning experiences in Social Studies. Many students said that incorporating varied teaching and learning materials (TLMs) went beyond conventional textbook education, fostering exploration and curiosity that made the subject more engaging and relevant. They said these resources helped them understand complex topics by linking theory to practical, real-world scenarios, boosting their confidence, especially during assessments. Many students reported improved academic results, crediting their heightened understanding and analytical abilities to the opportunities these resources provided for active participation and investigation beyond memorisation. Moreover, learners valued the incorporation of culturally pertinent materials, including regional artefacts, narratives, historical records, and folk songs, which helped bridge disparities across their varied backgrounds and nurtured a sense of identity and pride. This practical, engaging method not only improved comprehension but also motivated students to participate more actively in class discussions, ask insightful questions, and create more reflective projects and presentations (TBCE, TTCE, TEPCE and TSVCE, students' focus group discussion).

Differences in Engagement and Understanding with and Without Instructional Materials

The second subtheme emphasises differences in Engagement and Understanding with and Without Instructional Materials.

A tutor discussed variations in student engagement and comprehension when using instructional materials. The tutor said that at the start of their teaching career, they relied mainly on printed materials, including textbooks, and delivered lectures. They discovered that integrating diverse resources, such as visuals, narratives, and brief videos, significantly enhanced their teaching effectiveness. This shift increased student enthusiasm for learning when these topics were presented in class. These materials helped students grasp complex concepts more quickly, suggesting that learning went beyond memorising facts. The tutor

emphasised that the instructional materials enhance engagement, resulting in a significant increase in student participation during discussions (TTCE1, Source: field interview, 2024).

Another tutor also remarked:

The atmosphere and energy in the classroom shift when tutors use instructional materials. This shift alters the classroom dynamic from a one-sided lecture to a genuine dialogue. The tutor noted a significant difference in students' attention spans, observing that they actively engage through questioning, debating, and making connections. The tutor observed that students internalise the content rather than merely memorising it. The tutor noted that although students have inherent curiosity, traditional methods may not harness it effectively. The tutor saw instructional materials as tools for unlocking students' potential. When the tutor used "maps and historical images," students showed greater enthusiasm for exploring history, geography, and culture. The tutor characterised this experience as a "journey of discovery," in which students' understanding "extends beyond the surface" (TBCE2, Source: field interview, 2024).

In focus group discussions, students clearly articulated how incorporating instructional resources enhanced their engagement and comprehension, compared with conventional teaching techniques that relied primarily on textbooks and lectures. Many students said that lectures featuring graphics, stories, movies, maps, and historical imagery created a more engaging, vibrant classroom atmosphere. They said these tools sparked curiosity and enthusiasm, turning passive listening into active engagement through inquiry, discussion, and idea synthesis. Learners observed that these resources facilitated a faster, more comprehensive understanding of intricate Social Studies themes, moving beyond mere memorisation to deeper insight. Numerous participants noted that incorporating varied educational resources helped them assimilate facts more deeply, promoting a "journey of discovery" rather than superficial learning. They emphasised that this shift made classroom dialogues more engaging and intellectually stimulating, awakening students' intrinsic curiosity and potential in ways conventional approaches often did not. These student perspectives support tutors' assessments that cohesively designed instructional resources markedly enhance education quality and student engagement (TBCE, TTCE, TEPCE and TSVCE, students' focus group discussion).

Student Feedback and Observations Regarding Instructional Material Use

The third subtheme emphasises a significant transformation in the Social Studies classroom's intellectual framework, influenced by instructional materials. The findings indicate a positive correlation between students' perceptions and the subject matter's actual complexity, leading to a more engaging and motivating learning trajectory. A tutor shared:

“Student feedback reveals a notable transition from perceiving Social Studies as 'boring' to expressing enjoyment in attending class following the implementation of storytelling and group discussions. This underscores the significant impact of instructional materials on student engagement. This shift from boredom to enthusiasm indicates a significant change in the students' perspective on the subject. The

engagement attained, supported by instructional materials, aligns closely with pedagogical principles that encourage active learning and participation. The student's statement and the tutor's observation of "excitement and engagement" align with the study's broader findings, indicating that deliberately using diverse instructional resources significantly improves student engagement, comprehension, and motivation. Incorporating materials such as storytelling and group discussions contextualises abstract concepts, stimulates student interest, and accommodates diverse learning styles. This enthusiasm underscores how well-designed instructional materials foster positive attitudes and perceptions toward Social Studies. Integrating interactive resources, including storytelling, shifts classroom dynamics from passive listening to active participation, moving from memorisation to critical thinking and inquiry-based exploration. This demonstration of enhanced engagement confirms the significance of instructional materials as tools that can rekindle students' interest and enthusiasm, promoting a positive attitude towards learning and addressing the discrepancies between students' initial perceptions and the actual subject content" (TTCE1, Source: Field Interview, 2024).

Another tutor shared:

"Feedback from students indicating that instructional materials are 'relatable and enjoyable' reflects a notable shift in their learning perception, transitioning from an emphasis on 'passing exams' to 'establishing a connection with the content '." This sentiment underscores the transformative potential of well-implemented materials to influence students' attitudes toward the subject positively. This shift from academic compliance to authentic engagement underscores the importance of selecting materials that foster meaningful learning experiences and motivate students to see the content as relatable and enjoyable. Students' motivation to engage in research and learning beyond requirements illustrates the empowering effect of instructional materials, fostering lifelong learning habits, curiosity, and intellectual exploration. This shift indicates that the materials effectively connect theoretical concepts with students' personal experiences, thereby influencing outcomes beyond the classroom" (TEPCE2, Source: Field Interview, 2024).

Focus group dialogues with students indicated a significant change in their cognitive involvement with Social Studies, reflecting educators' perceptions of evolving mindsets driven by the utilisation of teaching resources. Many students said that before incorporating techniques such as storytelling and group dialogues, they often perceived the subject as "tedious" and uninviting. Nonetheless, they reported greater pleasure and enthusiasm in classroom engagement, underscoring a shift from passive learning to active participation. Learners said these resources helped contextualise abstract Social Studies ideas in accessible ways, catering to diverse learning preferences and promoting critical analysis and inquiry over rote memorisation. They explained how the classes became more engaging and intellectually enriching, helping them forge meaningful connections with the material beyond simply achieving passing grades. This innovative method fostered intrinsic motivation, curiosity, and a desire to explore subjects more deeply, both inside and outside the classroom. The feedback highlighted the transformative influence of thoughtfully crafted instructional materials in shifting perceptions of Social Studies from a mere academic obligation to

genuine engagement, fostering lifelong learning and deeper understanding connected to personal experiences and cultural backgrounds (TBCE, TTCE, TEPCE and TSVCE, students' focus group discussion).

Discussion on the findings

Perception of Instructional Material Influence on Student Academic Performance and Experience

The results indicate that deliberately incorporating instructional resources profoundly transforms Social Studies pedagogy in Northern Ghana's Colleges of Education, shifting classroom interactions from passive absorption to active, learner-focused exploration. This shift aligns with the CIPP model's Process assessment, emphasising how implemented strategies directly influence student outcomes. Instructional resources, including visual aids, stories, movies, and tangible objects, function as cognitive anchors, connecting abstract Social Studies ideas to students' real-life experiences. This method aligns with constructivist theories, in which concrete and relevant resources promote knowledge creation rather than mere memorisation. These materials offer multiple sensory avenues, accommodating different learning preferences and strengthening understanding and intellectual curiosity (Mereku, 2012).

Unlike conventional lecture-centric approaches that often limit participation to surface-level comprehension, many resources foster intrinsic motivation. This incentive leads to concrete academic improvements, evident in more meaningful class discussions, critical essays, and polished presentations, shifting students from simple adherence to authentic intellectual engagement. This corresponds with international demands for educational methods that foster critical thinking and teamwork, vital competencies for addressing intricate societal challenges.

Significantly, the results highlight the transformative potential of educational resources within the framework of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT). In Northern Ghana, with its rich cultural diversity, incorporating realia, local examples, objects, and stories is essential to make Social Studies relevant and meaningful (Gay, 2015). This approach addresses a key need when conventional curricula may inadvertently exclude pupils by neglecting their cultural resources. Culturally relevant resources validate students' identities, build cognitive and emotional connections to the content, and cultivate a sense of agency in their educational experience. This deep engagement fosters critical inquiry and dialogue, leading to stronger academic achievement. The focus on culturally inclusive resources in Northern Ghana stands in stark contrast to educational frameworks that depend on universal, decontextualised materials, which frequently neglect to engage students' natural curiosity and local expertise, consequently hindering their ability to be informed and active contributors to their communities - a fundamental democratic objective of Social Studies education (Gay, 2015).

Instructional resources drive comprehensive student growth, beyond simple academic success. Educators' perspectives indicate that deliberately incorporating regional illustrations and cultural artefacts is essential to closing cultural gaps and fostering a strong sense of identity in students (Gay,

2015). This aligns closely with Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), which promotes an inclusive educational atmosphere by recognising and appreciating varied cultural heritages. The process involves altering the educational experience. In Northern Ghana's diverse cultural landscape, contextually relevant resources tangibly affirm students' real-life experiences, making abstract Social Studies ideas directly applicable. This shift from passive absorption to active knowledge creation happens as these resources serve as concrete anchors, encouraging exploration and promoting discussion rather than just memorisation. This methodology helps students recognise and value their cultural heritage in formal education, fostering belonging and strengthening self-efficacy. This is vital when curricula feel disconnected from local contexts, as extensive research on indigenous teaching methods shows that cultural alignment strongly influences participation and educational outcomes. By positioning the educator as a guide for exploration, these materials let students immerse themselves in the content, cultivating critical thinking and a lasting commitment to inquiry, vital for navigating an ever-evolving global environment.

Student focus group conversations validate the instructors' views, highlighting the crucial impact of educational tools on improving Social Studies learning experiences. Constructivist learning theory posits that learners actively construct knowledge through meaningful interaction with content, and diverse teaching and learning materials (TLMs) support this process by fostering exploration and curiosity beyond mere textbook engagement. Students' feedback indicates that these resources connect theoretical concepts with practical, real-world applications, consistent with Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, which posits that multisensory input enhances understanding and memory by linking abstract notions to tangible experiences (Mayer, 2009). The increase in students' self-assurance and academic achievement, resulting from engagement and analytical experiences, illustrates Vygotsky's social constructivism, which underscores scaffolded learning through interaction and discourse, supported by varied instructional resources. Significantly, students' recognition of culturally relevant resources, such as local artefacts, stories, and traditional songs, supports Gay's (2015) model of Culturally Responsive Teaching, which posits that incorporating students' cultural heritages into education enhances identity validation, motivation, and involvement, thus closing socio-cultural divides in learning. This culturally responsive approach deepens understanding while promoting classroom engagement and contemplative thought, aligning with the democratic aims of Social Studies education by fostering critical inquiry and knowledgeable citizenship (Gay, 2015). These results indicate that carefully crafted, culturally pertinent educational materials are essential to shift Social Studies instruction from mere memorisation to engaging, student-focused exploration that aligns with learners' real-life experiences and improves academic achievement.

Differences in Engagement and Understanding with and Without Instructional Materials

Instructional resources profoundly transform student involvement and cognitive comprehension, shifting classroom interactions from passive absorption to active engagement. This shift moves pupils from rote

memorisation to analytical questioning and curiosity-driven investigation. This phenomenon, supported by resources such as images, stories, films, and interactive tools, directly aligns with constructivist teaching methods and corresponds to the Process element of the CIPP evaluation framework, which assesses strategy implementation in real time. The shift from passive knowledge acquisition to active knowledge creation is a defining characteristic of constructivism. Conventional methods that rely heavily on lectures and texts often lead to shallow understanding, but our research highlights the pivotal role of instructional resources in unlocking students' innate capabilities. In regions such as Northern Ghana, characterised by diverse cultural backgrounds and varying resource availability, traditional instructional approaches often fail to meet pupils' needs. Culturally relevant materials, like historical texts and folk music, serve not just as additional tools; they become essential for anchoring theoretical Social Studies ideas in students' lived experiences. This tangible link promotes stronger identity development and understanding, moving beyond mere content memorisation to cooperative, contextualised exploration. Deliberately incorporating these materials effectively implements constructivist principles, especially in culturally diverse settings where the curriculum may seem disconnected from students' experiences, fostering intellectual engagement and content assimilation.

The research results validate and build on the literature, showing that varied instructional resources are essential to achieving Social Studies goals, especially by promoting informed decision-making and civic participation while accommodating different learning preferences. These materials serve as essential cognitive connectors, translating abstract ideas into concrete comprehension. For example, as Turner and Patel (2017) highlight, genuine primary materials improve critical assessment of viewpoints, moving pupils from mere memorisation to analytical historical thinking. The processes behind this change are clear in the direct link between greater student engagement—shown through deeper inquiry and active involvement—and stronger academic results, including more sophisticated writing and polished presentations. This suggests that resources foster critical thinking, communication, and collaboration, amplifying their impact beyond simple classroom enjoyment. The shift in student attitudes from viewing Social Studies as "tedious" to seeing it as "engaging and enjoyable" (Mereku, 2012) highlights the psychological impact of interactive tools such as narrative and visual aids. This shift matters especially in Northern Ghana, where culturally relevant resources like local examples and artefacts connect the curriculum to students' varied backgrounds, promoting a sense of ownership and identity essential for sustained engagement (Gay, 2015). This culturally attuned methodology shifts motivation from mechanical test readiness to authentic intellectual engagement, fostering enduring inquiry and effectively illustrating the constructivist paradigm within a particular socio-cultural milieu. This strategic use of resources transforms the educational setting into a dynamic, conversational arena, aligning with the evaluation of implemented pedagogical tactics in the CIPP Process component.

Focus group conversations among students clearly show that incorporating varied educational materials markedly improved their involvement and understanding, in stark contrast to conventional textbook and lecture approaches. This finding aligns with constructivist learning theory, which argues that dynamic learning settings, marked by questioning, discussion, and collective integration, deepen cognitive engagement and knowledge creation (Piaget, as referenced). The use of multimedia resources such as

graphics, narratives, films, maps, and historical visuals aligns with Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, which emphasises the efficacy of dual-channel input (visual and verbal) in facilitating quicker and more thorough comprehension of intricate ideas. Students' accounts of moving from passive listening to active participation illustrate Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, highlighting the significance of social interaction and contextual learning in fostering advanced cognitive skills. Characterising learning as a "journey of discovery" rather than mere rote memorisation aligns with the constructivist focus on genuine, meaningful learning experiences that foster innate interest and motivation. Moreover, these varied resources increase cognitive engagement and stimulation, corroborating tutors' assertions that well-crafted instructional materials enhance educational quality and promote a dynamic, participatory classroom environment, aligning with Culturally Responsive Teaching principles that support materials reflecting students' backgrounds to optimise engagement and success. These observations collectively underscore the need for diverse, interactive teaching materials to shift Social Studies education from passive absorption to active, student-focused inquiry.

Student Feedback and Observations Regarding Instructional Material Use

Grounded in the CIPP model's Process assessment, this discussion clarifies how thoughtfully integrated instructional resources shape student learning and achievement. A key finding shows that materials effectively situate abstract ideas, making them comprehensible and sparking authentic student engagement. This shift moves beyond passive absorption, transforming students' view of Social Studies from "tedious" to captivating, a transition Mereku (2012) also observed. The mechanism involves materials that connect theoretical understanding with students' actual experiences. In Northern Ghana's varied socio-cultural environment, materials like local narratives and storytelling work best when paired with culturally attuned teaching methods, cultivating a strong sense of belonging and identity (Gay, 2015). This connection is vital because it fosters intrinsic motivation, pushing pupils beyond mere academic compliance toward genuine intellectual inquiry and growth.

This increased involvement yields clear cognitive advantages. Unlike conventional lecture-oriented approaches that often produce shallow comprehension, varied resources support deeper assimilation of material, encouraging critical evaluation rather than mere memorisation. This environment helps educators develop students' critical thinking abilities, which can shape their academic success and lifelong educational paths. This aligns with international academic discourse that promotes interactive learning settings that stimulate students' natural inquisitiveness and strengthen critical reasoning, moving beyond mere exam readiness. The proven effectiveness of these materials in fostering favourable student attitudes highlights their transformative capacity in educational environments, especially in resource-limited areas such as Northern Ghana, where they act as essential catalysts for equitable and meaningful learning experiences.

This discourse combines instructor perspectives and research findings to demonstrate the transformative potential of educational resources on student attitudes and engagement. A key finding is that students' perspectives shift from viewing subjects as "tedious" to seeing them as captivating and stimulating. As Mereku (2012) notes, this shift moves students from apathy to engaged involvement. The key process driving this change is the materials' ability to cultivate a deeper, more intimate relationship with the topic. By making learning "accessible and pleasurable," resources stimulate intrinsic drive, pushing students beyond mere memorisation and academic compliance into genuine intellectual inquiry and exploration. This approach aligns closely with the tenets of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), in which effective resources reflect students' varied cultural backgrounds and personal experiences (Milner et al., 2021). In the socio-cultural milieu of Ghana, especially in Northern Ghana characterised by its "diverse cultural legacies," the deliberate incorporation of local instances, tangible items, and stories is essential. These resources connect abstract theoretical ideas to students' practical experiences, building a strong sense of ownership, connection, and identity. This tailored interaction drives deeper learning, encourages inquiry-based investigation, and fosters enduring educational practices (Gay, 2015). This contrasts sharply with conventional instructional techniques, which often fail to sustain student engagement across varied environments. Educational resources that tailor learning experiences and cultivate authentic motivation mark a notable shift away from external incentives, empowering students with vital analytical abilities and a mindset favourable to lifelong learning and achievement beyond the classroom. This finding aligns with global academic research highlighting the importance of relevant, contextualised learning experiences in fostering deeper cognitive engagement and sustained scholarly interest.

Instructional resources empower students by inspiring them to seek knowledge beyond the prescribed curriculum and cultivating lasting learning practices and intellectual curiosity. This empowerment rests on students' ability to shift from passive reception to active participation, as shown by students expressing viewpoints, raising critical questions, and sharing experiences (Hew et al., 2021). This transition, aligned with constructivist and learner-focused teaching methods, helps cultivate vital analytical, communicative, and cooperative skills. These resources are essential for fostering inclusion by catering to diverse learning styles and backgrounds through customised instruction and varied learning opportunities. This is especially crucial in settings such as Northern Ghana, where student populations are diverse and access to resources varies, and a uniform strategy often falls short. By providing multiple formats and linking abstract ideas to concrete reality, materials help close potential educational gaps. This strategic integration not only improves educational outcomes but also enriches the learning experience by ensuring relevance and personal engagement for every student, moving beyond the constraints of conventional, standardised teaching. This approach differs from approaches that could unintentionally exclude learners by neglecting their distinct cognitive characteristics and cultural backgrounds, emphasising the need for resources to achieve equal educational outcomes.

Educational resources in Social Studies instruction mark a crucial pedagogical shift from traditional, passive teaching to interactive, constructivist, learner-focused approaches. The mechanism lies in materials that facilitate knowledge acquisition by stimulating students' intrinsic curiosity and promoting

genuine involvement. This shift, evident in the adept use of resources such as visual aids, narratives, and interactive technology, changes learning attitudes from apathy to favour. This shift encourages authentic engagement with content rather than superficial exam readiness. Instructional resources stimulate student agency and educational advancement by integrating 21st-century competencies, such as critical analysis, effective communication, and teamwork, into the learning experience. The evident student reaction, marked by expressed opinions, probing enquiries, and shared experiences, clearly indicates the effectiveness of this shift to active knowledge creation. These materials effectively connect abstract theoretical notions with practical uses, rendering intricate ideas comprehensible and accessible. This embodiment is essential within the Ghanaian socio-cultural framework, where varied cultural legacies and limited resources need educational techniques that link theoretical social concepts with students' individual experiences and cultural identities. By situating learning in relevant contexts, educators enrich knowledge, strengthen student self-assurance, and improve overall academic achievement, moving beyond rote memorisation toward deeper understanding. The methodology aligns with constructivist tenets, highlighting that learning is a dynamic, cyclical process shaped by meaningful engagement with the educational context.

The effectiveness of educational resources in Social Studies depends on their ability to foster inclusive learning environments. This is especially crucial in Ghana, where pupils come from a wide range of cultural backgrounds and have different abilities, requiring flexible teaching methods. By providing multiple access points through a range of materials, educators can tailor instruction to accommodate distinct learning styles and preferences. This strategic integration promotes fairness by ensuring theoretical ideas are comprehensible and relevant to every student, beyond the confines of standardised, lecture-centric approaches. The structural framework that supports this inclusion is the materials' ability to make abstract concepts tangible. Visual tools and multimedia, for example, surpass verbal and conceptual limitations by offering concrete representations that link academic ideas to practical implementations. This finding aligns with global academic research; Smith and Johnson (2018) observed similar improvements in comprehension and memory in science education, emphasising how these tools bridge conceptual divides. Similarly, this research's emphasis on critical inquiry and deeper understanding through instructional resources aligns with Anderson and Williams's (2017) findings in language arts, validating the interdisciplinary significance of these instruments in fostering advanced cognitive processes. These resources are crucial in shifting the educational framework from passive absorption to active exploration. They stimulate students' innate curiosity, turning the classroom into a space for exploration where learning goes beyond rote memorisation. This analytical transition is essential for Ghanaian Colleges of Education. It prepares students not only for scholastic achievement but also to participate informedly in societal discussions by cultivating a deep, contextual understanding of their culture and the wider community, a fundamental aim of Social Studies in the Ghanaian curriculum. This transformative capability highlights the crucial importance of carefully selected educational resources in fostering sustained learning and cognitive engagement.

The research results strongly confirm that intentionally integrating instructional resources transforms the Social Studies classroom from a passive, lecture-focused approach to an active, learner-centred

framework, consistent with constructivist theories. This change is not accidental; structural processes enable resources to foster cognitive transitions. Primarily, educational resources, including narratives, imagery, videos, and interactive components, adeptly situate abstract ideas. This system links academic understanding to practical, real-life applications, making intricate concepts accessible and understandable. This shift from mere memorisation to inquiry-driven exploration represents a significant cognitive advancement, as learners actively construct knowledge through sustained engagement rather than simply absorbing information. For example, historical tales or visual representations help pupils conceptualise past events or complex societal frameworks, cultivating an inherent curiosity that conventional textbook methods often fail to stimulate. This aligns with Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, which argues that delivering information through both visual and audio modalities improves processing and retention, processes essential to deep comprehension.

Second, this tactical integration directly affects student emotions and motivation. Instructors saw a significant change in students' attitudes, altering the subject from "tedious" to "engaging and relevant. This is an essential psychological process: when material genuinely connects, learners build an authentic bond that goes beyond mere academic compliance. This increased involvement shows in students' readiness to articulate opinions, raise incisive questions, and engage actively in dialogue. Within the Ghanaian socio-cultural framework, where educational customs often favour traditional teaching methods, such resources serve as a crucial link, enabling students to engage proactively in their educational experience and cultivating competencies necessary for civic involvement, thereby directly advancing the democratic objectives of Social Studies education.

Moreover, educational resources are essential to promoting inclusivity and fairness by addressing pupils' varied needs and cultural contexts. This framework supports equitable education, allowing educators to tailor lessons and offer multiple access points to the curriculum. Incorporating realia, regional examples, and culturally relevant stories ensures the content is relatable. It reflects students' identities and experiences, a core principle of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), as researchers such as Gay (2015) and Milner et al. (2021) emphasise. This connection cultivates ownership, boosts engagement beyond the classroom, and markedly improves academic performance in areas such as essays and presentations. In Ghana, with its diverse cultural heritage, this approach is essential to making Social Studies education meaningful and empowering for every student, enabling them to connect critically with their community. These materials' ability to cater to varied student demographics is therefore vital to their transformative potential, enhancing a learning environment that supports both the intellectual and democratic objectives of Social Studies education.

Focus group discussions with students indicated a significant shift in their cognitive engagement with Social Studies, reflecting educators' perceptions that deliberate use of teaching materials influenced changing student attitudes. Before incorporating techniques like storytelling and group discussions, students often described the subject as "monotonous" and unappealing, indicating a disinterested, passive learning attitude typical of conventional instructional methods (Mereku, 2012). Implementing culturally attuned, interactive materials aligns with the principles of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)

theory, which underscores the need to acknowledge students' cultural heritages to enhance relevance and engagement in learning (Gay, 2015). These educational resources contextualise abstract Social Studies ideas, cater to varied learning preferences, and foster critical inquiry rather than mere memorisation, aligning with constructivist theories that support active knowledge creation through meaningful involvement (Piaget; Vygotsky). The shift from passive reception to active engagement highlights the cognitive and motivational advantages of learner-centred teaching methods, as these approaches foster intrinsic motivation, curiosity, and a lasting inclination for deep inquiry beyond simple academic achievement. Moreover, this methodology supports continuous learning by connecting material to learners' individual experiences and cultural backgrounds, which theoretical frameworks indicate improves learning and identity development (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Consequently, the feedback highlights the transformative potential of meticulously crafted instructional resources to turn Social Studies from mandatory activities into captivating, culturally relevant educational experiences that encourage critical analysis and support lasting intellectual development.

Conclusion

This research shows that educational resources are essential to improving Social Studies instruction at Northern Ghana's Colleges of Education, primarily by improving students' academic outcomes and learning experiences. The study consistently demonstrated that appropriately selected materials promote a significant transition from passive absorption to active engagement, enhancing critical thinking, curiosity-driven inquiry, and a deeper understanding of complex concepts by connecting them to real-world applications. This methodology addresses diverse educational needs and backgrounds, fostering a positive, relatable view of Social Studies among learners and moving beyond memorisation to promote authentic intellectual involvement. Moreover, the research uncovered notable disparities in student involvement and understanding directly linked to the utilisation of educational resources. Observations revealed a significant increase in student engagement and comprehension when students used diverse resources, including visual aids, multimedia, narratives, and excursions. This shift from indifference to active engagement shows the materials' ability to ignite passion, foster active learning, and motivate students to participate in conversations, ask probing questions, and seek knowledge beyond the syllabus. Ultimately, student evaluations and firsthand observations underscored the significant influence of educational resources on the learning experience. Students reported deeper engagement with content when resources were available, enjoyable, and culturally relevant, prompting them to engage with the material rather than focus solely on succeeding in evaluations. This sense of ownership, belonging, and self-concept, especially through culturally relevant materials, heightened involvement and content assimilation, thereby enhancing academic achievement and advancing the overarching democratic aims of Social Studies education.

Recommendation

Educational policymakers and institutional administrators should emphasise the organised supply and availability of varied instructional resources for Social Studies teachers in Colleges of Education. Beyond

traditional textbooks, a diverse collection of resources, such as visual materials, multimedia, and excursions, should be readily accessible and systematically integrated. This ensures that theoretical Social Studies ideas connect effectively to students' lived experiences, promoting a shift to constructivist and pragmatic education, encouraging critical analysis, and improving overall understanding and academic achievement. Moreover, comprehensive professional development initiatives should equip Social Studies educators with the competencies needed to incorporate these diverse instructional materials effectively. Instruction should emphasise innovative pedagogical techniques that use these resources to build excitement, encourage active engagement, and shift classroom interactions from passive absorption to active participation. By enabling educators to vary their methods, these initiatives will markedly increase student involvement, inquiry-based exploration, and deeper content understanding. Ultimately, to cultivate deep and meaningful student involvement, educational institutions should promote the development and use of culturally relevant, relatable teaching materials. Integrating local stories, illustrations, and artefacts helps students connect theoretical ideas to their experiences and cultural heritage, fostering ownership and identity in the curriculum. This learner-focused methodology will deepen cognitive engagement and improve educational outcomes while equipping students to become knowledgeable, analytical contributors to social and political matters, thereby achieving the democratic aims of Social Studies instruction.

Limitation of the study

A disadvantage of this study is its focus on a specific geographic area, the Northern Region of Ghana, which may limit the applicability of the findings to other locations with different educational environments and cultural backgrounds. The study predominantly utilised qualitative data from interviews and observations, which, although offering comprehensive insights, may be influenced by researcher bias and participants' subjective interpretations. The sample size was limited to four colleges of education, which limited the diversity of opinions and experiences represented.

Declarations

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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.

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Author Contribution

G.B; F.A; A.B; I.E; G.K AND I.G all wrote the manuscript

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