
Instructional Methods for Teaching Social Studies: A Survey of What Primary School Children Like and Dislike about Social Studies Instruction

***Dr. Rajendra. Kumar Shah**

Abstract

Sufficient research studies are not conducted in the field of primary level social studies curriculum pertaining to effective instructional pedagogy. At the same time, research studies conducted in the field of primary level social studies fail to take into account one very important variable: How do the primary school children enjoy learning social studies? This paper is a survey research study designed to see what a group of primary school children liked and disliked about social studies instruction. By asking the questions the researcher hope to gain a better understanding of primary school children' preferences, attitudes and perceptions of social studies instruction. The major objective of this study is to gain a better understanding of what instructional methods the students enjoy in the social studies classroom. The findings of this study will be help for teacher in selection of proper teaching learning strategies.

Study Context

Traditionally, teaching is simply pouring curricular information to the students. It seems that learning is solely left on the part of the students while neglecting the fact that teaching only matters when learning truly occurs (Shah : 2013). Similarly according to the traditional belief, teaching was perceived as a business just to deal with the curricular provisions without connecting to social transformation, advancement and overall personality development of the student.

Beginning with the first education planning in 1954 in Nepal, quality of education has been emphasized. Education plan documents have progressively come up with various plans for improving classroom pedagogy-child centeredness, inclusiveness, individualism, joyful learning, active learning, continuous assessment and other such term has been used. Commissions on the Nepalese education system have expressed concerns about ineffective classroom teaching learning practices (Singh : 2008).

The first education commission of Nepal, Nepal National Education Planning Commission 1956, formally commented on pedagogical practice of Nepal for the first time in Nepal. The report of this commission emphasized both expansion of the education in terms of access and qualitative improvement of delivery. Quality of education has been a major educational focus since the commencement of report of this commission and quality obviously remained an anticipated vision so far. This report clearly demands

the respect for the individual differences and intelligent adaptation of the curriculum to various local conditions and to the individual differences of children. In effect this is related to child-centered principles. Thus it has given more emphasis on the child centered teaching learning process.

The common classroom pedagogical practices seemed to not be effective as pointed out by the National Education Commission (NEC) in 1992. This commission's report stated, "The teaching-learning situation in primary schools is rather depressing. Students are encouraged to learn by rote, and assessments are made on the same basis (NEC, 1992)."

Higher-level National Education commission also raised some issues related to diversity education. This report pointed out inability of primary level education to represent cultural diversity and regional needs. This commission suggested reformative teaching at the primary level (HLNEC, 1998). These commissions reports clearly indicate that teaching learning process adopted in the school level are unsatisfactory and most of the teaching learning processes are based on the rote learning.

Education for All (EFA) documents stress and put forward the child-centered education as vision regarding teaching-learning in the primary level in Nepal. EFA documents pointed out the emphasis on rote learning and teacher centered approach as dominant pedagogical practices at the primary level. The child-centered approach, individualized instruction, formative assessments are pointed out to be practiced for reforming classroom pedagogical practices. EFA emphasized the inclusion of cultural, linguistic and other social values of the local communities in the existing education system (MOES 2002). Education for All (EFA) documents also laid more emphasis on the child centered and activities based teaching learning process. These ideas reveals that educational commissions of Nepal also laid more emphasis on the child centered activities and teaching learning activities and methods. But these ideas and thoughts are implemented in real situations.

Research studies carried out at centre for Educational Research Innovation and Development (CERID) have repeatedly indicated that classroom teaching learning in the Nepalese schools is still dominated by rote learning. While studies related to classroom practices have mainly found classroom delivery to be teacher dominated with an emphasis on rote memorization of the content matter. The dominant approaches are lecturing, paraphrasing, drill, reading, and repeating from textbook and memorizing questions and answers. The classroom process, which is envisioned to be child centered, was found largely confined to the whole class teaching, with the effect that the weaker ones are left behind. A single language, single session, the same materials, the same method were the general practices in classroom delivery. The use of instructional materials for making learning meaningful was not found in most of the classroom at the primary level. The use of extracurricular activities and project works were almost non-existent.

In the context Nepal, a major problem of the existing primary level Social Studies is that in most of the cases the instructional approaches used in the classroom are not interactive, participatory and meaningful to the learner. The use of instructional materials for making learning meaningful is not found in most of the classrooms even at the primary level. The dominant approaches are lecturing, paraphrasing, drill, reading, and repeating from the textbook and memorizing questions and answers (CERID, 2005). The classroom process, which is envisioned to be child centered, was found largely confined to the whole class teaching, with the effect that the weaker ones are left behind.

Rational of the Study

Students often consider social studies to be dull and boring (Chiodo & Byford, 2006). Not only do students perceive social studies to be dull, but they also fail to see the relevance of social studies to their everyday lives (Schug, Todd & Beery, 1982 ; Shaughnessy & Haladyna, 1985). Why is this? Is it because the content is truly dull and boring; or is it because the instructional methods utilized by the teacher do not engage and inspire students to learn social studies. Shaughnessy & Haladyna (1985) concluded that "It is the teacher who is key to what social studies will be for the student. Instruction tends to be dominated by the lecture, textbook or worksheets and social studies does not inspire students to learn" (p.694) Siler (1998) explained that teachers tend to use only one teaching style day after day, which denies students the opportunity of a variety of teaching techniques.

Ellis, Fouts, and Glenn (1992) stated that teacher soften rely solely on text, lecturing, worksheets and traditional tests as methods of learning. However, research concludes that students have more interest in a topic when a variety of teaching methods are implemented (Bonwell & Eisen, 1991; Chiodo & Byford, 2006; Byford & Russell, 2006; Mills & Durden, 1992 ; Slavin, 1994).

The ability to use various techniques and methods for instruction is often neglected by educators. Teachers tend to have students participate in activities that do not encourage critical thinking, but instead encourage rote memorization of names, dates, & places. VanSledright (2004) explained "the common preoccupation with having students commit one fact after another to memory based on history textbook recitations and lectures does little to build capacity to think historically" (p.233). In addition, Hoagland (2000) observed that teachers need to connect the content to the individual interests of the students, thus increasing student interest in the content and actively engaging students in the learning process. This entails utilizing a variety of teaching techniques that help engage students in the learning process. Some examples of engaging instructional methods include cooperative learning, role playing, and technology (Driscoll, 2005).

Stahl (1994) explains that using cooperative learning requires students to become active learners. Furthermore, Stahl (1994) believed that, "cooperative learning provides opportunities for students to learn, practice, and live the attitudes and behaviors that reflect the goals of social studies education" (p. 4-5).

Using various teaching techniques is considered by many a best practice, and numerous studies conclude positive results with regard to the use of various instructional methods. For example, Dow (1979) concluded that direct observation, data gathering, reading, role-playing, constructing projects, and watching films are all excellent ways to provide students with new information. Using film to enhance social studies instruction has been found to be an effective instructional method (Russell, 2007; Russell, 2008; Paris, 1997). In 2006, researchers concluded that using simulations heightened student interest and increased understanding (Russell & Byford). As well, researchers have found that the discussion method is a valuable method for teaching social studies (Harwood & Hahn, 1990; Byford & Russell, 2007).

In 2006, researchers concluded that 85% of the 8th grade teachers who participated in the study used whole class presentation (lecture) as a method of instruction. As well, the researchers concluded that 64% of teachers had students reading textbooks and 54% had students complete a worksheet as part of the class activities (Leming, Ellington, & Schug). This data exemplifies that teachers utilize lecture-based instruction and non-engaging activities despite numerous research findings.

In the context Nepal, the major problem of the existing primary level Social Studies is that in most of the cases the instructional approaches used in the classroom are not interactive, and participatory. In most of the social studies classroom in Nepal, lecturing, paraphrasing, drill, reading, and repeating from the textbooks and memorizing questions and answers are used frequently (CERID, 2005). In the most of the social studies classrooms in Nepal, interaction between the students during classroom teaching, the use of extracurricular activities and projects works are almost non-existent (CDC, 2005). It clearly indicates that the teaching learning approaches adopted in primary level social studies in Nepal have not been successful to foster the development of intelligence, creativity, creative thinking and independent learning. It requires active involvement of children in the learning process. This calls for further detailed study in teaching learning process of primary level social studies Nepal. So, this study has been carried out in order to investigate about the teaching learning process adopted in primary level social studies in Nepal.

Aim and Objectives of the Present Study

The purpose of this article is to attempt to answer the following questions: (i) How do primary school children like to learn social studies ? (ii) What do primary school children dislike about social studies instruction ? By asking these questions the

attitudes and researchers hope to gain a better understanding of primary school children's preferences, perceptions of social studies instruction. The major objective of this study is to gain a better understanding of what instructional methods the students enjoy in the social studies classroom. Thus the present study has the following objectives:

- to find out the more interesting teaching learning strategies in the primary level social studies,
- to find out the uninteresting interesting teaching learning strategies in the primary level social studies, and
- to recommend effective and more interesting teaching learning activities for primary level social studies.

Method

This research study utilized a survey method as described by Creswell (2005). Utilizing a convenient sample, a total of 1000 primary school (1-5) students from primary schools of Kathmandu valley participated in this study. This particular district is a charter district designed for conducting research. Meaning, the students at this district represent a population typical of at other district found throughout the country. The researchers chose to use this district for the study because the results of research can be more easily generalized to other schools in the country. To preserve the anonymity of the subjects, all demographic data concerning students have been roughly approximated. Any conclusions or interpretation of the data should take this into consideration.

Each student was given the survey which utilized an open ended response format. The survey was administered to students in their respective social studies class. To encourage full participation and reliable feedback from the students, several things were mentioned at the beginning of the study and explained to the students by the researchers. It was explained to students that no names were required on their survey because we wanted them to answer the questions without fear of repercussions or punishment. Students were informed that this survey was not for a grade, but rather an opportunity for them to provide valuable feedback regarding how they like to learn in the social studies classroom. Also, students were asked to refrain from evaluating their individual teachers in this study. The researchers told the students that the purpose of this study was not to determine the popularity, or lack thereof, of the students' teachers. Instead, we wanted to know what methods make learning social studies engaging and interesting. Students were encouraged to have multiple responses to each question when applicable. Of the 1000 (N) students of primary school, a total of 950 (n) responses were collected in this study. The researchers read and analyzed each response and categorized them accordingly.

Results

The results of the survey data were not surprising with regards to why students dislike social studies. However, some of the data concluded findings that the researchers considered promising. Each open-ended survey question will be presented following the statistical outcome for each category that emerged from the data.

Table 1 : Question-1. How do you like to learn social studies ?

S. N.	Activities	Percentages
1	Cooperative Learning Activities	86%
2	Study guides, reviews, and review games to help prepare for exams	86%
3	Using Graphic Organizers and Foldable	82%
4	Technology (Internet, Film, Video, etc...)	75%
5	Hands-on/Active Learning	70%
6	Field Trips	65%
7	Student Presentations	60%
8	Class Discussions	60%

Sources: Field Study Report-2013

Table 2 : Question 2. What do you dislike about social studies instruction ?

S. N.	Activities	Percentages
1	Lecture	80
2	Rote Memorization and Note-taking	76
3	Worksheets	74
4	Busy Work	67
5	Assignments from the Textbook	64

Sources: Field Study-2013

Result and Discussion

In response to the first question students expressed their view that they do like to learn social studies in multiple ways. This notion of learning social studies using an array of methods and techniques corresponds with the views of Bonwell & Eisen (1991) and Russell & Byford (2006). The results of the data conclude that primary school students want to go on field trips, work in cooperative learning groups, and be actively engaged with content. Passive learning, such as lecture, note-taking, busy work, worksheets, and rote memorization is what students dislike about social studies as suggested by Leming, Ellington, and Schug (2006). The results of data clearly illustrate that students want to be actively involved in learning social studies.

Smuth (1984) says that if children find teaching learning difficult, it could well be that there is something wrong with the way we are asking them to learn rather than that something is wrong with their innate capacity for learning. This notion indicates

that teaching learning strategies and methods are major concern especially in primary level social studies. Teaching learning activities have not been designed on the basis of nature and difficulty level of the subject matters, need, interest and maturity level of the children, classroom situation, and social, physical and educational conditions of the most of the primary schools in Nepal.

According to APEID (1982) the learning experiences should be in line with the objectives, retain the students interest, have transferred and utility value, logically organized and psychologically sound by paying attention to the principles of instructional design and human development. This statement clearly suggests that there must be a close relationship between teaching learning activities and intended learning outcomes. Similarly, learning activities should be based on the need, interest and aspirations of the children. Primary school children cannot read and write as the matured students. Interesting activities are necessary for them. Interesting activities are included in the most of the teachers' delivery.

Teaching learning plan should contained a variety of teaching learning activities including observation, class discussion, question answer, small group projects, field trips and community resources as pointed out by the Childress (1978). At the same time, relevant teaching aids are also not suggested in the teaching learning process. According to the necessity a teacher may use locally available teaching learning materials. Most of teachers did not use easily available, applicable and locally available teaching aids. On the other hand, chart, posters, models, real objects, pictures, photos, maps and other locally available materials were not used by the most of the teachers.

In sum, it is clear that primary school students want to be taught social studies using a variety of teaching methods and techniques. Primary school students dislike the passive learning environments they have often grown accustomed to and want to be actively engaged in social studies. This data clearly suggested that teachers should become more reflective about their instructional approach and they should adapt their teaching style to meet the interest and needs of the students.

It should be noted that the survey was anonymous and open-ended, which enabled students to tell inappropriate and unusable responses. Roughly 12% of the survey responses were deemed unusable. It must be stated that the discussion of the findings raises many questions based upon a small study, but the outcomes are interesting and complex, highlighting new and different realms of inquiry and variability. However, it is necessary to remember that the results of this study help researchers understand a student's response in a specific situation and contribute to scholarship on primary school students' attitudes toward social studies instruction and learning, allowing researchers to make comparisons with research that has been previously conducted. These findings do not provide a comprehensive understanding that can be generalized to the population, but do provide insight into the importance of dynamic social studies instruction.

Findings

- Most of the teachers of the present study have not used activity based, child centered and innovative teaching learning strategies in the primary level Social Studies classroom.
- Effective teaching aids are not used in the classroom and indigenous and locally developed materials are also nonexistent.
- Most of the teachers do not use appropriate teaching aids because they have not sufficient knowledge about it and curriculum has also not made sufficient provision about it.
- It was also observed that teaching learning process has been affected by the lack of sufficient physical facilities.
- Most of the teachers are untrained so they are not able to use curriculum, teachers' guides and teaching learning materials effectively.
- Most of the teachers have heavy load of the classes along with other school responsibility. It has also hampered the teaching learning activities of the school.
- There is no close relationship between teaching learning activities and intended learning outcomes. Similarly, learning activities are not based on the need, interest and aspirations of the children.
- Relevant teaching aids are not included in the teaching learning process.

Suggestions

- Activity based, child centered and innovative teaching learning strategies should be included in the curriculum.
- There should be more emphasis on locally developed and indigenous materials.
- Most of the teachers do not use appropriate teaching aids because they have not sufficient knowledge about it and curriculum has also not made sufficient provision about it. So regular training on the teaching methodologies and teaching aids should be provided to all teachers.
- It was also observed that teaching learning process has been affected by the lack of sufficient physical facilities. So government should take responsibility of the physical facilities.
- Most of the teachers are untrained so they are not able to use curriculum, teachers' guides and teaching learning materials effectively. Therefore training on curriculum, textbooks, teachers' guides and learning materials should be provided to all teachers.
- Most of the teachers have heavy load of the classes along with other school responsibility. It has also hampered the teaching learning activities of the school. Teachers teaching loads should be reduced to minimum loads.

References

- APEID (1982). *Towards a Better Science Education*. Report of a Study Group Meeting: on Science Curriculum and Instructional Materials Development (10-18 Nov. 1981), Bangkok : UNESCO.
- Bonwell, C. & Eison, J. (1991). *Active Learning: Creating Excitement in the Classrooms*, Washington D.C. Eric Clearinghouse on Higher Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction No. ED340272).
- Byford, J. & Russell, W. (2006). *Analyzing Public Issues-Clarification through Discussion: A Case Study of Social Studies Teachers*. *Social Studies Review*, 46(1), 70-72.
- Chiodo, J. & Byford, J. (2006). *Do They Really Dislike Social Studies? A study of Middle School and High School Students*. *The Journal of Social Studies Research*, 28(1), 16-26.
- CERID, (2005). *Meeting Learning Needs of Children of Indigenous Peoples and Linguistic Minorities*. Kathmandu, Nepal : CERID, TU.
- CDC, (2005). *Primary Education Curriculum*, Curriculum Development Center, Bhaktapur, Nepal.
- Childress, R. B. (1978). *Public School Environmental Education Curricula*. A National Profile. *Journal of Environmental Education*, 9 (3).
- Creswell, J. (2005). *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Dow, P. (1979). *MACOS: Social Studies in Crisis*. *Educational Leadership*, 43,1, 35-39.
- Driscoll, M.P. (2005). *Psychology of Learning for Instruction* (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Ellis, A., Fouts, J. & Glenn, A. (1992). *Teaching and Learning Social Studies*. New York: Harper-Collins Press.
- Harwood, A.M. & Hahn, C.L. (1990). *Controversial Issues in the Classroom*. Bloomington, IN: Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. 327453)
- HLNEC, (1998). *Report of the High level National Education Commission*. (in Nepali). Kesharmahal, Kathmandu, Nepal : Higher level National Education Commission.
- Hoagland, M. (2000). *Utilizing Constructivism in the History Classroom*. Bloomington, IN: ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies / Social Science Education.(ERIC Document Reproduction No. ED 482436).
- Leming, J.S., Ellington, L., & Schug, M. (2006). *The State of Social Studies: National Random Survey of Elementary and Middle School Social Studies Teachers*. *Social Education*, 70(5), 322- 327.

- Mills, C.J. & Durden, W.G. (1992). *Cooperative Learning and Ability Grouping: An Issue of Choice*. Gifted Child Quarterly, 36 (1), 11-16.
- MOES, (2002). *Concept Paper for Further Support on Basic and Primary Education in Nepal*. Kathmandu, Nepal : Ministry of Education and Sports.
- NEC, (1992). *Report of the National Education Commission*. Kathmandu, Nepal : National Education Commission.
- Paris, M. (1997). *ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education*. Bloomington, Indiana. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EDOS09714).
- Russell, W. (2007). *Using Film in the Social Studies*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Russell, W. (2008). *Civil War Films for Teachers and Historians*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Russell, W. & Byford, J. (2006). *The Evolution of Man and His Tools: A Simulation from the MACOS Project*. The Journal for the Liberal Arts and Sciences, 10(3), 17-21.
- Shah, Rajendra Kumar (2013). *Designing a Progressive Curriculum of Social Studies for Primary Education in Nepal*. An Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Lucknow, Lucknow India.
- Smuth, J. C. (1982). *The Place of the Environmental Education*. The UNESCO-ENEP Program. Journal of Environmental Education 8 (2).
- Schug, M.C., Todd, R.J. & Beery, R. (1982). *Why Kids Don't Like Social Studies*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Council for the Social Studies. Boston, MA. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED224765).
- Shaughnessy, J.M. & Haladyna, T.M. (1985). *Research on Student Attitude toward Social Studies*. Social Education, 49, 692-695.
- Siler, C.R. (1998). *Spatial Dynamic: An Alternative Teaching Tool in the Social Studies*. Bloomington, IN. ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies / Social Science Education. (ERIC Reproduction No. ED415179).
- Singh, G. B. (2008). *Provision and Conditions for Better Classroom Pedagogical Practices*, CERID, Kathmandu, Nepal.
- Slavin, R.E. (1994). *A Practical Guide to Cooperative Learning*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon Press.
- Stahl, R. (Ed.). (1994). *Cooperative Learning in Social Studies: A Handbook for Teachers*. New York, NY: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.
- VanSledright, B. (2004). *What Does it Mean to Think Historically and How Do You Teach It ?* Social Education, 68(3), 230-233.