

PERCEPTION OF SECONDARY LEVEL STUDENTS TOWARDS SOCIAL STUDIES SUBJECT

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Abstract

This study examines the perception of secondary level students toward the social studies subject in community schools of the Madi Municipality, Bagmati Province of Nepal. This study is based on a quantitative research design and primary data source. Primary data are collected from field observation and a structured questionnaire method. Likert scale has been used to measure students' perceptions of social studies subject. A total of 194 students from six community schools studying in grade nine and ten were selected using a random sampling method from Madi Municipality. The modified Likert scale has been used to measure students' perceptions which ranges from 4-1 for strongly agreed (4), agreed (3), disagreed (2), and strongly disagreed (1). The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software is used for data tabulation and interpretation. The result indicates that there is a positive attitude of students toward secondary level social studies subject. They have no anxieties about different aspects of the social studies classroom. The result further asserts that the largest percentage of the respondents agreed about their interest in the subject and disagreed with anxiety about social studies as a school subject.

Keywords: Perception, social studies, integrated subject, curriculum framework, good citizens.

Introduction

Social studies is the interdisciplinary integration of social science and humanities for problem-solving and decision-making in order to develop citizenship skills on critical social issues (Barr et al., 1997). As a subject, social studies emphasizes the importance of advocating democratic ideals and social justice, as well as reflective thinking skills. These content areas help students develop the critical citizenship skills required for

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research, discussion, and debate sessions (Bining & Bining, 1952). The purpose of social studies, according to the National Council for Social Studies (2010), is to help young people develop the ability to make reasoned decisions for the public as good citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world. The core social studies curricular objectives are divided into four categories: knowledge, skills, values, and participation (Barr, 1977).

Students' attitudes toward a subject are a reasonable predictor of their interest in that subject (Dundar & Rapoport, 2014). Attitudes are an important indicator of educational quality and a significant predictor of students' future choices. An attitude is a state of readiness that enables an individual to perceive phenomena in specific ways and act accordingly; attitudes are also dynamic and have motivating properties (Halloran, 1967). If a given subject is to maintain public support, attitudes toward it must be positive. Negative attitudes toward a subject may result in a decrease in resources because all current stakeholders were once students, and their attitudes toward subjects can persist (Haladyna & Thomas, 2015). When it comes to attitudes toward social studies in schools, the importance attributed to this subject does not correspond with its mission; it is not regarded as important as it should be (Schug et al., 1982; Wood et al., 1989). This underemphasis on the importance of social studies is one of the reasons why it is frequently overlooked in comparison to other core subjects like reading, science, or mathematics (Bailey et al., 2006; Thornton & Houser, 1996).

The School Sector Development Plan divides formal education into two levels: primary (grades 1–8) and secondary (grades 9–12). Social studies is currently mandated as a compulsory subject in Nepali schooling. The primary Education Curriculum (2006) framework developed the social studies curriculum for grades 1 to 5, which included social studies and creative arts (CDC, 2008). The units from the lower grades have been upgraded in the social studies curriculum for grades 6 to 8, and an emphasis on population studies has been added. The CDC has implemented the secondary level (Grades 9 & 10) curriculum in conjunction with the revised curriculum (CDC, 2016), in which social studies is one of the compulsory subjects, and has implemented the secondary level (Grades 11 & 12) curriculum of all compulsory subjects (CDC, 2016), in which social studies and life skill education is a compulsory subject.

Students develop their understanding of the world by learning about the relationships between people and their environments in social studies curricula. It develops reflective thinking skills and advocates democratic ideals and social justice. The teachers' perceptions revealed that the subject matters of social studies are difficult to teach due to their complex nature. It integrates varieties of subject matters including social sciences,

natural sciences, humanities and science, and technology. Thus, teaching and learning social studies subject is considered more challenging for both students and teachers. Marlow and Inman (1997) argue that 'teaching in the school is often suffered from two conditions: a lack of time spent on the subject and passive teaching strategies that rely on textbook use. These conditions have also been reflected in teaching social studies curricula and students' attitudes toward this subject. In this context, this paper attempts to analyze students' attitudes toward social studies subject from selected community secondary schools of Madi Municipality, Bagmati Province, Nepal.

Methods and Materials

This paper is based on a quantitative research design. Quantitative research is a method of testing objective theories by investigating the relationship between various variables (Creswell, 2009). Secondary school students' perceptions of social studies were gathered using a descriptive method. The purpose of a descriptive survey research design is to describe the current state of affairs (Kothari, 2003). This survey allows for large amounts of data to be collected from the target population. The participants were selected from 9th and 10th grade students using a random sampling method. About 194 students were chosen from 6 community secondary schools in Madi Municipality, Bagmati Province of Nepal. Of the total participants, 93 (47.9%) were boys and 101 (52.1%) were girls. Similarly, 94 (48.5%) participants were selected from grade 9 and 100 (51.5%) from grade 10. A modified Likert scale was prepared and administered with the help of social studies teachers in their regular classes. A Likert scale mean was used with assigned values 4,3,2,1 for strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree respectively. The collected data were coded, statistically analyzed, and interpreted. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used to analyze data. Various statistical techniques were applied to interpret frequencies, mean and related forms in tables.

Results and Discussions

Interest in Social Studies

Social studies are diverse and interdisciplinary due to the complexity of our environment and the value of intelligent, informed, and active people in a democratic society (Singer, 2003). Mensah (2019) found that students in the greater Accra region of Ghana's Accra metropolitan assembly have favorable opinions regarding studying social studies. A survey of 194 students from six schools was conducted to learn more about their interests in and opinions about social studies classes and courses.

Table 1: Interest in social studies

Item	4	3	2	1	Mean
I have usually enjoyed studying social studies in school.	46	79	45	24	2.75
I like the topics we do in social studies.	40	85	46	23	2.73
The things we learn in social studies are interesting.	34	76	47	37	2.55
I am happier in a social studies class than in any other class.	37	71	44	42	2.53
I have usually been at ease during social studies course	43	83	39	29	2.72
I think social studies is irrelevant and unimportant and therefore should be taken out of school.	30	69	50	45	2.43
I have usually been at ease during social studies tests.	25	88	44	37	2.52
I take social studies assignments seriously.	42	75	45	32	2.51

Source: Field survey

NOTE: Items recoded from positive to negative direction. Items were measured using a 4-point scale 4=strongly agree, 3=agree, 2= disagree, and 1=strongly disagree.

Table 1 represents the students' interest in the social studies curriculum at the secondary level. The result indicates that the majority of students have been enjoying social studies classrooms. According to Chiodo & Byford (2004), social studies is well-liked in the United States among students in the 8th and 11th grades. Alazzi & Chiodo (2004) argued that the teaching environment is significant in the students' views of social studies. The result revealed that 125 (64.4%) respondents usually enjoyed studying social studies classroom, while 69 (35.6%) disagreed with this statement. The calculated mean is 2.75, which lies above the average point. It can be concluded that students have usually enjoyed studying social studies in the classroom. The figure also revealed that 125 (64.4%) respondents agreed and they liked the topics they do have in social studies. Indeed it was 69 (35.6%) for the disagreement. The calculated mean of 2.73 indicates that students like the topics they study in social studies. Thiveos and Moroz (2001) revealed that most of the students preferred social studies subject in Australia, has supported the clarification of this statement.

Likewise, the result shows that 110 (56.7%) students agreed the things they learn in social studies are interesting while 84 (43.3%) respondents disagreed with this statement. The mean was obtained at 2.55 which is above the average point. It can be concluded that students who have learned social studies are interested in school. In addition, 108 (55.67 percent) respondents agreed that they are happier in a social studies class than in any other class whilst of the total, 86 (44.33 percent) participants disagreed with this statement. The mean was obtained at 2.53 which means they are happier in a social studies class than in any other classes.

Also, 126 (65%) of the total students agreed that they have usually been at ease during social studies courses whilst 68 (35%) of the respondents disagreed this statement. The mean was obtained at 2.72 which is above the average point. This means that students have usually been at ease during social studies courses. On the other hand, 99 (51%) respondents agreed that they think that social studies is irrelevant and unimportant and therefore should be taken out of the school while 95 (49%) respondents disagreed this statement. The mean was obtained at 2.43 which is below the average point. It can be concluded that students have not thought that social studies is irrelevant and unimportant and therefore should be taken out of school.

Again, 113 (58.3%) of the total students agreed that they have usually been at ease during social studies tests whilst 81 (41.7%) of the total respondents disagreed this statement. The mean was obtained at 2.52 which means that students have usually been at ease during social studies tests. Moreover, 117 (60.3%) of the total students agreed that they take social studies assignments seriously whilst 77 (39.7%) of the respondents had disagreement with this statement. The mean was obtained at 2.51 which is above the average point. This means that students take social studies assignments seriously.

Anxiety toward social studies

Fernandez et al. (1976) analyzed those students who believed their future careers would be more likely to involve in English and mathematics than social studies in high school. Hansberry & Moroz (2001) calculated a mean score of 2.90 out of 5 revealing that students' attitudes about social studies subject was unfavorable in Australia. Table 2 shows the level of anxiety toward social studies subject in the study area.

Table 2: Anxiety toward social studies

Item	4	3	2	1	Mean
Studying social studies makes me feel nervous	23	39	77	55	2.15
I am always under a terrible strain in a social studies class	24	46	74	50	2.12
I get really uptight during social studies tests	37	53	68	36	2.46
I get a sinking feeling when I think of trying hard problems	30	46	73	45	2.31
I am unable to think clearly when studying social studies	19	50	76	49	2.20
Social studies make me feel uneasy and confused	20	45	71	58	2.14

Source: Field survey

NOTE: Items recoded from positive to negative direction. Items were measured using a 4-point scale 4=strongly agree, 3=agree, 2= disagree, and 1=strongly disagree.

Schug et al. (1984) found that students did not think social studies was significant or fun. But in this study, of the total 194 students who participated in the study, 62 (31.96 percent) respondents agreed with the statement that studying social studies makes them feel nervous, while 132 (68.04 percent) respondents disagreed with this statement. The mean was obtained at 2.15 which is below the average point. It can be concluded that students studying social studies do not make them feel nervous. In addition, 70 (36.08 percent) respondents agreed that they were always under a terrible strain in a social studies class whilst 124 (63.92 percent) of the participants disagreed with this statement. The mean obtained at 2.12 said that students they were not under a terrible strain in a social studies class.

Also, 90 (46.39 percent) of the total students agreed that they get really uptight during social studies tests whilst 104 (53.61 percent) of the respondents disagreed with this statement. The mean was obtained at 2.46 which is just below the average point. This means that students do not get really uptight during social studies tests. On the other hand, 76 (39.18 percent) respondents agreed that they get a sinking feeling when they think of trying hard problems while 95 (60.32 percent) respondents disagreed with this statement. The mean was obtained at 2.31 which is below the average point. It can be concluded that students have not thought that they get a sinking feeling when they think of trying hard problems.

Again, 69 (35.57 percent) of the students agreed that they are unable to think clearly while studying social studies whilst 125 (64.43 percent) of the respondents disagreed with this statement. The mean was obtained at 2.20 which means that students were able to think clearly when studying social studies. Moreover, 65 (33.51 percent) of the students agreed that social studies make them feel uneasy and confused whilst 129 (66.49 percent) of the respondents disagreed with this statement. The mean was obtained at 2.14 which is below the average point. This means that social studies make only fewer student feel uneasy and confused.

Conclusions

As shown by the outcome of this study, there is a good perception of the subject of social studies education among secondary level students. Most students enjoyed social studies classes and got interested but some students thought social studies is irrelevant and unimportant in the school curriculum. They were happier in a social studies class than in any other classes in schools. The respondents who expressed interest in social studies as a subject for school were more likely to be in agreement. The result indicates that there is a positive attitude of students toward secondary level social studies subject. They have no any anxieties about different aspects of the social studies classrooms.

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