

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

**STUDENTS' INTERESTS IN THE STUDY OF SOCIAL STUDIES: A CASE STUDY
OF JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS WITHIN THE NEW JUABENG NORTH
MUNICIPALITY**

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MASTER OF EDUCATION

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UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA



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**A dissertation submitted to the school of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of
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(Social Studies Education)**

**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**

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DECLARATION

Student's Declaration

I, Michael Gbenyo, hereby declare that this dissertation with the exception of quotations and references contained in published works which have all been identified and submitted is entirely mine which has not been submitted for another degree in this University or elsewhere.

Signature:

Date:

Supervisor's Declaration

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this work were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of dissertation as laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.

Supervisor's Name: Prof. Alfred Kuranchie

Signature:

Date:

DEDICATION

To my beloved family, the Gbenyo family who gave me the support, to the hundreds of teachers as well as learners of the subject Social Studies in the New Juabeng Community who contributed to the success of this research work, our supervisors in the University who made this work possible. And most especially to our Almighty God, this research work is dedicated to you.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined students' interest in Social Studies at the Junior High School (JHS) level in selected schools within the New Juaben North Municipality of Ghana. The study was motivated by concerns about declining student engagement in Social Studies despite ongoing curriculum reforms aimed at promoting critical thinking, civic competence, and practical life skills. The research adopted a positivist paradigm and employed a quantitative descriptive cross-sectional survey design. The target population comprised JHS students and Social Studies teachers in public and private schools within the municipality. Using Yamane's sample size determination formula, 359 students and 112 teachers were selected through purposive and convenience sampling techniques. Data were collected using structured questionnaires designed to measure levels of student interest, identify topics that generate high interest, determine topics that pose teaching challenges, examine topics that present learning difficulties, and explore factors contributing to challenges in learning Social Studies. The collected data were analysed with descriptive and inferential statistics including frequencies, percentages, means, Relative Importance Index, One-Way Analysis of Variance, independent samples t-test, and Pearson correlation, using SPSS version 26. The findings indicated that topics such as adolescent reproductive health, independent Ghana, and socialisation generated high student interest, whereas the 1992 Constitution, tourism, and conflict prevention presented major teaching challenges. Students experienced notable learning difficulties with abstract civic and constitutional topics. The factors contributing to challenges included difficult concepts, language barriers, inadequate instructional resources, limited teaching time, and low relevance of subject. The study concluded that misalignment between curriculum expectations and classroom practices undermines student interest.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Education systems worldwide recognise the importance of Social Studies as a subject that shapes learners' understanding of their societies, responsibilities as citizens, and capacity to engage thoughtfully with social, economic, and environmental issues (Pufaa, Rahman, & Saayir, 2023; Yalley, Adjei & Akore, 2023). In Ghana, the inclusion of Social Studies in the basic school curriculum was intended to foster the development of civic competence, critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and responsible citizenship (Curriculum Research and Development Division [CRDD], 2007; Ministry of Education, 2019, as discussed in recent reviews of Ghana's Social Studies curriculum [NaCCA, 2020]). However, despite these well-intended curricular goals, evidence from field observations and empirical studies indicates a persistent challenge: many junior high school (JHS) students exhibit low engagement, minimal interest, and poor performance in Social Studies classes (Adubea, 2023).

In many JHSs across Ghana, Social Studies appears to be losing its appeal among learners. Research conducted in the Greater Accra region identified several factors shaping students' attitudes and interest in the subject. For instance, a mixed-method study by Frimpong (2020) found that teachers' limited use of varied teaching methods, failure to address controversial or socially relevant issues, inadequate teacher-student support, and insufficient teaching and learning materials significantly influence students' attitudes toward Social Studies. Similarly, in some districts, Social Studies teachers seldom employ resource persons or contextual materials that link classroom learning to the students' lived realities (Frimpong, 2020). Consequently, when students juxtapose Social Studies with other subjects such as Integrated Science

or Mathematics, these omissions create a perceptible gap that further undermines the subject's perceived relevance to their learning experiences.

The consequence of such disinterest and low engagement is far-reaching. When students treat Social Studies as a subject for rote recall, i.e., merely memorising facts, dates, names, and definitions rather than as a discipline for understanding society, history, civic responsibility, and social change, the fundamental aims of the subject are undermined. Indeed, the very *raison d'être* of Social Studies, cultivating socially aware, critically minded, and active citizens, becomes lost. This situation, therefore, poses a serious problem for both educational outcomes and broader civic goals in Ghana. It raises critical questions: if students remain disengaged, how can Social Studies fulfill its intended role in producing informed and responsible citizens?

The problem is not limited to student apathy. At the root lies what can be described as a curricular and pedagogical disconnect: a gap between what the Social Studies curriculum intends to achieve (critical thinking, civic competence, analytical skills) and how it is delivered in the classroom. Empirical studies on Social Studies pedagogy in Ghana reveal that many teachers rely heavily on traditional, teacher-centered instructional methods (primarily lecture and chalk-and-talk approaches) with minimal use of participatory, inquiry-based, or learner-centered strategies (Akowuah, Asante, & Asibey, 2025). In some cases, even when instructional materials exist, they are inadequate or outdated, which limits the capacity of teachers to employ more engaging and contextually relevant pedagogies (Arko & Kporyi, 2024).

The pedagogical practices being used, therefore, reflect an older tradition of teaching Social Studies as a fact-based, content-heavy subject where success is measured by the ability to memorise and reproduce information rather than as a dynamic, skills-

based discipline aimed at developing critical citizenship. As noted in a study of Ghanaian basic schools, many Social Studies teachers lack the training and confidence to apply pedagogical strategies that encourage critical thinking, discussion, application of concepts, and engagement with real-life social issues (Bordoh et al., 2024; Yaw et al., 2022). This disconnect suggests that while the curriculum may have been revised to encourage analytical and practical skills, the actual classroom practice remains rooted in traditional and passive methods (Mensah et al., 2023).

This mismatch between curriculum aims and pedagogical realities has a direct impact on student interest. When the teaching is dominated by rote memorisation and lecture, students often find the subject abstract, irrelevant, or uninteresting. A study summarising challenges in Social Studies in basic schools argued that students frequently experience Social Studies as disconnected from their personal lives and community realities, thereby reducing their motivation to engage meaningfully with it (Yaw et al., 2022). Furthermore, limited use of community resources, field-based learning, discussion of contemporary social issues, and interactive media (e.g., multimedia, ICT) further exacerbates the problem, making learning seem theoretical and dull rather than practical and alive (Mensah et al., 2023).

Moreover, the quality and content-knowledge of Social Studies teachers also matter. In a study in the Shama district, Social Studies teachers reported that their academic and professional qualifications significantly influenced their capacity to teach Social Studies effectively. Teachers with deeper content knowledge and specialised training were more likely to deploy diverse teaching techniques and strategies that could foster student interest (Asibey & Arhin, 2022). By contrast, where teachers lacked such

training, the delivery was often superficial and less engaging. This suggests that the problem of student disinterest may not simply be a matter of curriculum design but also of teacher capacity, pedagogical skill, and resource availability.

Given this complex interplay of factors, there is a pressing need for an in-depth investigation into how students' interests in Social Studies emerge (or fail to emerge) in the context of Ghana's JHS environment. This is particularly relevant in light of recent curricular reforms in Ghana, which emphasise a shift from rote memorisation of facts to developing analytical, critical thinking, and life-applicable skills. While the official curriculum outlines progressive aims of nurturing informed and active citizens capable of engaging with societal issues, the reality on the ground appears to lag, resulting in a gap between policy intent and classroom experience.

This study, therefore, aims to examine not only the level of student interest in Social Studies but also the factors that influence it, including pedagogical practice, teacher quality, resource availability, and curriculum-pedagogy alignment. Through a case study of junior high schools within the New Juaben North Municipality, the research seeks to reveal how the curricular intent of Social Studies is (or is not) reflected in classroom realities, and how this alignment (or misalignment) affects student engagement, attitudes, and performance.

Understanding these dynamics is critical for several reasons. First, as Ghana continues to reform its educational curricula to meet contemporary challenges and global educational standards, it is essential to assess whether those reforms translate into meaningful learning experiences for students. If the reform remains on paper but fails in practice, the purpose of education, that is, producing critical thinkers, socially aware citizens, and active participants in democratic life, remains unmet. Second, the

study offers potential insights for teacher training institutions and educational policymakers. If teacher quality, pedagogical methods, and resource availability are shown to be significant predictors of student interest, then targeted interventions (training, provision of instructional materials, pedagogical support) can be designed to improve Social Studies education outcomes. Third, on a broader societal level, revitalising student interest in Social Studies can contribute to strengthening civic engagement, social responsibility, and community awareness.

In sum, this study emerges from a real and urgent educational problem: the declining interest and engagement of junior high school students in Social Studies in Ghana, which threatens to undermine the subject's intended goals of fostering critical citizenship, social awareness, and analytical skills. The root of the problem appears to lie in a multifaceted curricular and pedagogical disconnect, where the design of the Social Studies curriculum and the lived reality of classroom teaching diverge significantly. By systematically exploring this disconnect and its impact on student interest within the New Juaben North Municipality, the study aims to contribute to knowledge that can help bridge the gap between curriculum reforms and effective classroom practice, thereby realising, in practice, the full potential of Social Studies as a vital component of Ghana's basic education.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In Ghana, the teaching and learning of Social Studies at the Junior High School (JHS) level is premised on a curriculum that is intended to go beyond mere factual knowledge. The national Social Studies curriculum (NaCCA, 2020) envisions a subject that fosters critical thinking, civic competence, problem-solving, and active youth engagement in social, political, and economic life (CRDD, 2007; Ministry of

Education, 2019). The curricular reforms and guidelines emphasise that Social Studies should not be restricted to memorisation of dates, names, and definitions; rather, it should cultivate analytical capacities, social awareness, and practical life skills that enable students to become informed, responsible, and active citizens (CRDD, 2007). Yet, despite this laudable intent, there remains a pervasive and persistent problem: many JHS students exhibit inadequate interest in the study of Social Studies. This apathy undermines the very *raison d'être* of the subject, thereby weakening its potential to contribute meaningfully to national development and civic education.

The core problem addressed by this study, therefore, is the inadequate student interest in Social Studies at JHS, particularly within the context of the New Juaben North Municipality. This lack of interest persists despite curricular reforms ostensibly aimed at making Social Studies a dynamic, relevant, and student-centered discipline. The prevalence of low engagement manifests in several observable ways: minimal participation in class discussions; superficial study habits focused on rote memorisation; poor academic performance in Social Studies examinations; and widespread perceptions among students that the subject is dull, irrelevant, or less important compared to “core” subjects such as Mathematics, English, and Science. Such patterns suggest that the curriculum’s underlying goals have not translated into meaningful learning experiences for many students.

Understanding this problem requires grappling with the mismatch between what the curriculum aims to achieve and how students actually perceive and experience the subject. On paper, the Social Studies curriculum aims to equip learners with social awareness, civic responsibility, and analytical capacities to understand and respond to social issues, thereby preparing them for active participation in democratic processes

and community development (CRDD, 2007). In practice, however, many students regard Social Studies as a repository of facts to be memorised for exam purposes, and thus, disconnected from their lived realities, aspirations, and societal contexts. This gulf between curricular aspirations and student perceptions is not trivial. It reflects a systemic failure of the pedagogical process to engage students in the kind of deep, skills-oriented, and participatory learning envisioned by curriculum designers.

There are multiple interlinked reasons for this dissonance. First, many Social Studies teachers reportedly adopt traditional, teacher-centered pedagogical methods (lecture, rote explanation, and copying of notes) giving little or no room for interactive, inquiry-based, or contextually meaningful learning experiences. When teaching methods remain anchored in rote transmission, the learning process becomes passive; students do not develop a sense of ownership, relevance, or personal connection to the subject matter. The result is predictable: lack of engagement, minimal intrinsic motivation, and declining interest. Second, limited resources including inadequate textbooks, teaching aids, and community-based learning opportunities restrict the possibility of bringing Social Studies content alive through practical, real-world application. Without these supports, Social Studies remains abstract and decontextualised, reinforcing the view of it as a “school subject” rather than a means of understanding and influencing society. Third, teacher capacity and training may be insufficient: some teachers may lack the pedagogical content knowledge or confidence to deliver Social Studies in ways that foster critical thinking, discussion, or civic engagement. The lack of ongoing professional development in modern pedagogies further compounds this problem.

The consequences of this problem extend beyond poor academic performance or low grades. At the individual level, when students regard Social Studies as irrelevant or uninteresting, they miss out on opportunities to develop citizenship skills, social awareness, and critical thinking; tools essential for navigating and contributing to the complex social, political, and economic challenges of contemporary Ghana. At the institutional level, persistent disinterest undermines the effectiveness of curriculum reforms: resources invested in curriculum design and policy changes become wasted if the classroom implementation fails to bring the vision to life. At the societal level, the failure to produce citizens equipped with social consciousness, civic competence, and a sense of responsibility frustrates the broader educational goal of nation-building, democratic participation, and social cohesion.

Moreover, this problem creates a vicious cycle: low interest leads to superficial learning and poor performance, which in turn reinforces negative attitudes toward the subject, making future engagement even less likely. Over time, the value of Social Studies in the eyes of learners erodes, and the subject becomes marginalised in academic and career planning, as students focus on subjects perceived to lead to “useful” careers. This undermines both the short-term academic objectives and the long-term societal aspirations associated with Social Studies education.

Given this context, it becomes critical to explore why many students in JHS, particularly in New Juaben North Municipality, show little interest in Social Studies despite the curriculum’s emphasis on active engagement, critical thinking, and social relevance. What are the factors that influence student interest (or lack thereof)? Are pedagogical methods aligned with the aims of the curriculum? Do resource constraints, teacher capacities, or contextual realities affect the implementation of

Social Studies in a way that diminishes its appeal? Without systematic investigation, these questions remain speculative, and the core problem remains unaddressed.

Indeed, while the national curriculum has been reformed with progressive goals in mind, evidence suggests that in practice the translation of curricular intent into classroom reality is partial at best. For example, in similar educational contexts across Sub-Saharan Africa, researchers have identified a trend in which Social Studies education is delivered in a rote and exam-oriented manner, limiting opportunities for real-world relevance, critical engagement, and student-centered learning (Angyagre, 2020). These patterns mirror the anecdotal and observational evidence reported by teachers and students in Ghanaian basic schools, where Social Studies is often considered less important and engaging than other core subjects, and where students' attitudes and motivation toward the subject are low (Mensah, 2020).

The problem is especially acute in municipalities like New Juaben North, where socio-economic, infrastructure, and resource constraints exacerbate the challenge. Schools may lack adequate teaching materials, classrooms may be overcrowded, and teachers may be overburdened, all of which limit the ability to deliver Social Studies in an engaging and effective manner. Under such conditions, even committed teachers may find it difficult to implement the participatory and skills-based pedagogies that the curriculum envisages.

Consequently, this situation constitutes a serious threat to the broader aims of Social Studies education in Ghana. If many JHS students fail to engage meaningfully with Social Studies, then the broader objectives of developing socially aware, critically minded, and civically responsible citizens will remain unfulfilled. In effect, the foundational premise of Social Studies education that schooling should contribute to

active citizenship, social cohesion, and sustainable national development is compromised.

Therefore, there is an urgent need for empirical investigation into the factors influencing student interest in Social Studies within the New Juaben North Municipality. By identifying and analysing these factors, the study aims to shed light on the systemic failures and gaps that hinder the realisation of the curriculum's aims. In doing so, it seeks to provide evidence-based recommendations to improve the teaching and learning of Social Studies, align pedagogical practices with curricular goals, and ultimately, enhance student engagement, civic competence, and the social value of Social Studies education in Ghana.

Hence, this statement of the problem underscores a persistent and significant disconnect. Although the Social Studies curriculum in Ghana has been reformed to emphasise critical thinking, practical skills, and civic education, many JHS students remain disengaged, uninterested, and unconvinced of the subject's relevance. This disconnect undermines not only the academic and pedagogical integrity of Social Studies, but the broader societal goals of citizenship education and social development.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors influencing students' interest in the study of Social Studies at the Junior High School level within the New Juaben North Municipality to provide evidence-based insights that can help align pedagogical practices with the goals of Ghana's current Social Studies curriculum.

1.4 Research Objectives

The study sought to:

1. identify topics in the JHS Social Studies curriculum that generate high interest among students;
2. examine topics in the JHS Social Studies curriculum that pose teaching challenges to teachers;
3. identify topics in the JHS Social Studies curriculum that present learning difficulties to students; and
4. explore factors that contribute to students' challenges in learning Social Studies at the JHS level within the New Juaben North Municipality.

1.5 Research Questions

Based on the research objectives, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. Which topics in the JHS Social Studies curriculum generate high interest among students?
2. Which topics in the JHS Social Studies curriculum pose teaching challenges to teachers?
3. Which topics in the JHS Social Studies curriculum present learning difficulties to students?
4. What factors contribute to students' challenges in learning Social Studies at the JHS level within the New Juaben North Municipality?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies primarily in its potential to contribute to a deeper understanding of the persistent gap between Ghana's Social Studies curriculum reforms and students' actual engagement with the subject at the JHS level. Over the past decade, Ghana has undertaken several curriculum reforms aimed at transforming Social Studies from a predominantly content-based subject, focused on rote memorisation, into a more learner-centered discipline that emphasises critical thinking, problem-solving, and the practical application of knowledge. Despite these reforms, anecdotal evidence and preliminary research suggest that many students continue to perceive Social Studies as irrelevant, uninteresting, or overly theoretical. By investigating the factors influencing students' interest in Social Studies within the New Juaben North Municipality, this study seeks to identify the extent to which curricular reforms have successfully translated into classroom practice and meaningful learning experiences. Such insights are crucial for understanding why, despite reforms designed to enhance engagement, students' interest and active participation in Social Studies remain limited.

Additionally, this research offers practical insights for teachers and policymakers regarding the design and delivery of Social Studies curricula. Understanding which topics in the curriculum generate high student interest and which present challenges for both teachers and learners can inform pedagogical strategies and instructional planning. For instance, findings from this study could guide teachers in adopting more interactive, student-centered teaching approaches, such as inquiry-based learning, collaborative projects, and the use of contextualised examples drawn from students' communities. Policymakers and curriculum developers could also use the findings to revisit the content, structure, and sequencing of the Social Studies curriculum,

ensuring that it not only aligns with national educational goals but also resonates with students' interests, experiences, and learning needs. By bridging the gap between curricular intentions and classroom realities, the study has the potential to enhance both the effectiveness and relevance of Social Studies education in Ghanaian JHSs.

Furthermore, this study serves as a foundation for future research into curriculum implementation and pedagogical effectiveness within Ghanaian education. The findings can stimulate further scholarly inquiry into factors affecting student engagement in other subjects or regions, creating a broader evidence base for improving teaching and learning practices in basic education. By highlighting the interplay between curriculum design, teaching practices, and student interests, the research contributes to the broader discourse on educational reform and quality improvement in Ghana.

In brief, the significance of this study extends beyond the immediate context of the New Juaben North Municipality. It not only provides actionable insights for teachers and policymakers to enhance student engagement in Social Studies but also contributes to the wider understanding of how curriculum reforms are experienced and enacted in Ghanaian schools. Ultimately, the study aims to promote more meaningful, interest-driven learning experiences that equip students with the knowledge, skills, and civic competence necessary for personal development and active participation in society.

1.7 Delimitation of the Study

The delimitation of this study refers to the boundaries within which the research was conducted, specifying the scope and focus to ensure a manageable and targeted investigation. This study is confined to examining students' interests in the study of

Social Studies at the Junior High School (JHS) level within the New Juaben North Municipality. The focus on JHS students is deliberate, as Social Studies forms a core component of the basic school curriculum in Ghana, and it is at this stage that foundational knowledge, skills, and attitudes towards civic responsibility and social awareness are developed. By concentrating on this educational level, the study seeks to provide insights into how students engage with the subject during a critical period of cognitive and social development, which has implications for both their academic performance and broader civic competence.

In terms of content, the study is delimited to specific aspects of the Social Studies curriculum, particularly the topics that generate high student interest, those that pose challenges for teaching and learning, and the factors influencing students' engagement. While the Social Studies curriculum encompasses a wide range of themes including history, geography, economics, civics, and culture, this study does not attempt to evaluate all components comprehensively. Instead, it focuses on identifying patterns of interest and difficulty among students and exploring how these relate to pedagogical approaches, classroom experiences, and resource availability.

Geographically, the study is limited to schools within the New Juaben North Municipality. This delimitation allows for an in-depth investigation that considers local contextual factors such as teacher quality, school resources, community engagement, and socio-cultural influences, which may not be generalisable to other districts in Ghana. Additionally, the study is confined to the academic year in which data collection takes place, reflecting the experiences and perceptions of students and teachers at that specific point in time. By establishing these delimitations, the research maintains focus, ensures feasibility, and allows for detailed analysis while

acknowledging that findings may not fully represent other contexts outside the study area.

1.8 Definition of Terms

In the context of this study;

Interest refers to the level of attention, curiosity, enthusiasm, and engagement that Junior High School students exhibit toward learning Social Studies, encompassing both intrinsic motivation and active participation in classroom activities.

Challenges are the obstacles or difficulties that students and teachers encounter in the teaching and learning of Social Studies, including conceptual complexity, inadequate teaching resources, ineffective pedagogical approaches, or socio-cultural factors that hinder meaningful engagement with the subject.

Citizenship education denotes the aspect of Social Studies that aims to equip students with knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary for responsible participation in civic life, fostering social awareness, democratic responsibility, and community involvement.

Student perception refers to how learners view, interpret, and make sense of the Social Studies curriculum, teaching methods, and classroom experiences, influencing their level of interest, motivation, and learning outcomes.

Teacher perception, on the other hand, is the way instructors understand and interpret the Social Studies curriculum, their role in delivering content, and their assessment of students' learning needs, which shapes their teaching strategies, engagement methods, and classroom practices.

Together, these concepts frame the study's exploration of the factors affecting students' interest in Social Studies and the dynamics of teaching and learning within the New Juaben North Municipality.

1.9 Organisation of the Study

This study is structured into five chapters to provide a systematic and coherent presentation of the research process and findings. Chapter One introduces the study, presenting the background, statement of the problem, purpose, research objectives, research questions, significance, delimitations, definitions of key terms, and the organisation of the study, thereby laying the foundation and rationale for the research. Chapter Two reviews relevant literature on Social Studies education, with particular emphasis on conceptual, theoretical, and empirical perspectives, including the Ghanaian curriculum reforms, global trends, and factors influencing student interest, while highlighting gaps in existing studies. Chapter Three details the research methodology, describing the research design, population and sample, data collection instruments, procedures, and methods of data analysis, as well as ethical considerations guiding the study. Chapter Four presents and discusses the results of the study, including statistical analysis of students' interest in Social Studies, challenges faced by both teachers and students, and the factors influencing engagement, linking the findings to the literature and theoretical frameworks. Finally, Chapter Five provides a summary of key findings, draws conclusions, offers recommendations for teachers, policymakers, and curriculum developers, and suggests areas for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of relevant literature on the factors influencing students' interest in Social Studies, focusing on both global perspectives and the specific context of Ghanaian education. The chapter begins by examining the conceptual foundations of Social Studies, including its definition, objectives, and pedagogical approaches, followed by a discussion of key theoretical frameworks. It also explores the evolution of Social Studies education, highlighting the shift from rote memorisation to an emphasis on critical thinking, civic engagement, and practical skills. The chapter further reviews literature on the challenges faced by both students and teachers in Social Studies classrooms, including curriculum-related, pedagogical, and contextual factors. Additionally, it provides insights into the role of curriculum reforms, particularly in Ghana, and their impact on student engagement. Finally, the chapter addresses global trends in Social Studies education and offers a comparative analysis of best practices, setting the stage for a deeper exploration of the specific challenges and opportunities within the New Juaben North Municipality. Through this review, the chapter aims to identify gaps in existing research and provide a theoretical foundation for the study's investigation into the factors influencing students' interest in Social Studies.

2.2 Theoretical Frameworks

This section explores the theoretical underpinnings of the study by examining key educational theories including Constructivist Learning Theory, Cognitive Development Theory, Interest Theory, Self-Efficacy Theory, and Pedagogical

Content Knowledge (Shulman's Framework) to understand how they inform students' engagement with Social Studies and its pedagogical processes at the Junior High School level.

2.2.1 Constructivist Learning Theory and Social Studies

Constructivist Learning Theory, which emphasises the active role of learners in constructing their own knowledge, provides a valuable framework for understanding how students engage with Social Studies. This theory, primarily developed by cognitive theorists such as Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, underpins the idea of student-centered learning, advocating for an interactive, exploratory, and critical approach to education. In the context of Social Studies education, constructivism aligns with the subject's goals of fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and active citizenship. Despite the strong theoretical support for a constructivist approach, its full implementation in the classroom, particularly in Junior High Schools (JHS) in Ghana, remains limited.

Constructivism and Student-Centered Learning

Constructivism fundamentally challenges the traditional, teacher-centered educational model by suggesting that learning is a dynamic, interactive process where students actively construct meaning from their experiences. Piaget (1973) and Vygotsky (1978) posited that learners do not passively receive information but instead build knowledge by engaging with new concepts in relation to their prior experiences and knowledge. In this model, the teacher acts as a facilitator or guide rather than a mere transmitter of facts. The role of the teacher, therefore, is to provide an environment where students are encouraged to explore, question, and reflect upon the content.

In the context of Social Studies, constructivism has significant implications. Social Studies aims to develop students' ability to understand complex social, political, and economic systems, which can be better achieved through interactive, student-driven learning experiences. For example, by engaging students in debates, discussions, and problem-solving activities around real-world issues such as poverty, climate change, or social justice, constructivist pedagogy allows students to explore these topics actively, using evidence and critical reasoning to form their own conclusions (Searles, 2022). This approach encourages students to ask questions, challenge assumptions, and develop a deeper understanding of societal issues.

In the JHS classroom, constructivism encourages students to move beyond rote memorisation of facts and to engage with Social Studies content in a more meaningful way. For example, rather than memorising historical dates and events, students could examine the causes and consequences of these events, explore different perspectives, and analyse how they still affect society today. This not only deepens their understanding but also nurtures essential skills such as critical thinking, analysis, and the ability to relate classroom knowledge to the real world.

Furthermore, Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) underscores the importance of social interaction and collaboration in learning. According to Vygotsky (1978), learners can achieve higher levels of understanding when they work collaboratively with more knowledgeable peers or adults. In the context of Social Studies, this might involve group work, peer teaching, or collaborative problem-solving tasks that encourage students to work together, exchange ideas, and co-construct knowledge. This collaborative approach mirrors the

real-world interactions students will encounter as they engage in democratic processes or work in diverse, multifaceted environments.

Implications for Curriculum Design

Constructivist learning has profound implications for the design of the Social Studies curriculum. A curriculum that is grounded in constructivism encourages exploration, inquiry, and critical thinking rather than passive reception of information. Ideally, such a curriculum would feature hands-on activities, real-world case studies, and opportunities for students to engage with their local and global communities. For instance, students might work on projects that require them to investigate current social issues, engage in fieldwork or community service, or participate in debates and simulations that mimic real-world political processes. These methods promote active learning and help students connect their academic work to practical, real-life situations (Fosnot, 2013).

Furthermore, a constructivist approach to curriculum design would emphasise inquiry-based learning, where students are given the autonomy to explore topics of interest, formulate questions, and seek answers through research and investigation. This aligns with the aims of Social Studies, which seeks to develop students' abilities to think critically about social issues, understand multiple perspectives, and participate in informed decision-making. In this context, the Social Studies curriculum becomes not just a set of prescribed content, but a dynamic learning environment that encourages active participation, self-directed learning, and the development of life skills.

Despite the strong theoretical foundation for constructivism in Social Studies, it is often not fully implemented in practice. Several factors contribute to this discrepancy,

including limited teacher training, overcrowded classrooms, and an emphasis on exam-driven learning. In Ghana, the Social Studies curriculum has undergone several reforms, yet the move towards a more constructivist approach has been slow and uneven (Dwomoh, 2018). Many teachers continue to rely on traditional methods of instruction, such as lecturing and rote memorisation, which do not foster the active engagement and critical thinking necessary for Social Studies learning. This gap between theory and practice is particularly noticeable in rural or resource-poor schools, where teachers often lack the materials and support needed to implement innovative pedagogical methods.

One significant challenge to the implementation of constructivist practices is the examination-driven nature of the educational system. In many Ghanaian schools, including those in the New Juaben North Municipality, students are assessed primarily through exams that focus on recalling facts rather than demonstrating critical thinking or problem-solving skills. As a result, teachers may prioritise test preparation over the exploration of social issues or inquiry-based learning. This emphasis on exams can discourage the use of active, student-centered pedagogies that are central to constructivism.

The Gap Between Constructivist Ideals and Practice

While the potential benefits of constructivist learning are clear, the implementation of these ideas in Social Studies classrooms often falls short. Despite the curriculum's emphasis on critical thinking and active learning, many teachers continue to face significant challenges in adopting more student-centered, inquiry-based approaches. Teacher professional development is critical to bridging this gap. Teachers need adequate training in constructivist methods, as well as the necessary resources and

support to foster an environment where students can actively engage with the content and develop the skills needed to analyse and solve real-world problems.

Moreover, the role of the teacher in a constructivist classroom is markedly different from traditional instruction. Teachers must be facilitators of learning, guiding students through complex concepts, helping them navigate challenges, and supporting their growth as critical thinkers. For this to happen effectively, teachers need to be well-versed in strategies that promote collaboration, problem-solving, and inquiry. This underscores the importance of ongoing professional development, peer collaboration, and support systems for teachers to make the transition from traditional teaching methods to constructivist pedagogies (Moll, 2020).

2.2.2 Cognitive Development Theory and Adolescent Learning

Cognitive Development Theory, primarily articulated by Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, provides a fundamental framework for understanding how adolescents learn, especially within the context of subjects like Social Studies. This theory posits that cognitive abilities develop in stages, with each stage having distinct characteristics and learning capacities that influence how adolescents engage with new information. In the case of Social Studies education, these theories offer crucial insights into how young learners process complex social, political, and historical concepts, and how teachers can design effective teaching strategies to promote engagement. This section explores cognitive development theories and their implications for adolescent learning, specifically within Social Studies classrooms at the Junior High School (JHS) level.

Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development suggests that individuals pass through four distinct stages of cognitive growth: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete

operational, and formal operational. At the Junior High School level, students typically fall into the formal operational stage, which begins around the age of 11 and continues into adulthood. This stage is characterised by the ability to think abstractly, reason logically, and engage in hypothetical-deductive thinking (Piaget, 1973). In this stage, adolescents develop the ability to consider multiple perspectives, form complex ideas, and evaluate abstract concepts, skills that are essential for understanding the social, political, and historical issues presented in Social Studies.

In Social Studies, the formal operational stage allows students to engage with abstract ideas such as democracy, justice, rights, and governance. For example, when studying historical events such as the independence movements in Ghana or other parts of the world, students can think critically about the causes and consequences of these events, rather than just memorising dates and names. Similarly, in learning about political systems, economic theories, or social issues, students are expected to move beyond concrete facts and engage with the broader, often more abstract implications of these concepts. Piaget's model highlights the importance of fostering an environment where students are encouraged to think critically, analyse information, and explore the relationships between ideas, all of which are central to Social Studies education (Piaget, 1973).

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory further expands on Piaget's ideas by emphasising the social nature of cognitive development. Vygotsky (1978) argued that cognitive development is deeply influenced by social interactions and cultural context. His concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) emphasises that learners can achieve higher cognitive levels when they are supported by more knowledgeable peers or adults. In the context of Social Studies, this implies that students can better

understand complex social and historical concepts through collaborative learning, where they can engage in dialogue with their peers and teachers, thus co-constructing knowledge.

For instance, when studying global issues such as poverty or climate change, students may benefit from group discussions, collaborative projects, or debates that allow them to explore different viewpoints and come to a more nuanced understanding of these topics. The ZPD suggests that students should be provided with opportunities to work within their developmental capabilities, with scaffolding from teachers or peers to extend their learning. This approach aligns well with the social nature of Social Studies, which encourages students to engage with real-world issues and think critically about the world around them.

Theoretical Connection Between Developmental Stages and Student Engagement in Social Studies

Adolescence, marked by the transition from childhood to adulthood, is a time of significant cognitive, emotional, and social development. According to cognitive development theory, this stage is particularly crucial for the development of higher-order thinking skills that are necessary for academic subjects like Social Studies. As students mature cognitively, they develop an increased capacity for abstract thought, allowing them to engage with the more complex content of Social Studies.

In Social Studies, engagement often requires students to move beyond the concrete, factual knowledge they may have encountered in earlier grades, to engage with abstract concepts like rights, justice, government, and global citizenship. This shift from concrete to abstract thinking is critical for the study of social, political, and historical issues, all of which are inherent to the subject. The cognitive development

theory suggests that adolescents, as they enter the formal operational stage, are increasingly capable of engaging in complex analysis and critical thinking, which are core competencies of Social Studies education.

However, while adolescents are capable of abstract thought, they may not automatically possess the skills necessary to critically analyse complex societal issues. This is where the pedagogical approach plays a key role. Vygotsky's theory suggests that students can be guided through this developmental process by providing appropriate scaffolding. Teachers can support students by encouraging inquiry-based learning, providing opportunities for collaborative work, and engaging students in discussions that help them to critically evaluate information and develop their understanding of social issues.

A good example of this is the teaching of historical events. Piaget's theory highlights that at the formal operational stage, students are capable of understanding historical events as interconnected and multifaceted, rather than merely as a series of isolated facts. For instance, students studying the independence movements in Ghana or other African nations might be encouraged to explore the political, economic, and social factors that contributed to these movements. Through such an approach, students are not simply memorising facts; they are developing the ability to think critically about cause and effect, to analyse the impact of historical events, and to make connections to contemporary issues.

Moreover, Vygotsky's emphasis on social interaction in cognitive development suggests that Social Studies teaching should not be limited to traditional methods of instruction. Instead, learning should involve a high degree of collaboration, communication, and active participation. For instance, teachers might use group

projects, class debates, or simulations that allow students to take on roles such as political leaders or social activists. This not only makes learning more engaging but also mirrors real-world situations, where individuals must navigate complex social and political dynamics. By incorporating Vygotsky's idea of social learning, teachers can help students engage more deeply with Social Studies content and enhance their cognitive development.

Adolescent Learning and the Engagement Gap in Social Studies

Despite the theoretical alignment of cognitive development with student engagement in Social Studies, in practice, there is often a gap in how well the developmental needs of adolescents are met in the classroom. Research has shown that while the Social Studies curriculum in many countries, including Ghana, is intended to foster critical thinking and civic engagement, the way the subject is taught often fails to capture students' interest or cater to their developmental needs (Angyagre, 2020). Much of the teaching still relies on rote memorisation and teacher-centered instruction, which does not fully engage adolescents in the active, critical thinking required by the curriculum. This misalignment between the cognitive development of adolescents and the pedagogical practices employed in Social Studies classrooms may contribute to the lack of interest in the subject.

Piaget's theory and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory both emphasise the importance of an interactive, constructivist approach to learning. Yet, in many schools, particularly those in resource-limited settings, the lack of professional development for teachers and insufficient educational resources limit the effective application of these theories in practice (Tarman, Kilinc, & Aydin, 2019). The challenge, then, lies in bridging the gap between the cognitive development of adolescents and the pedagogical methods

used in Social Studies classrooms, ensuring that teaching strategies align with the developmental needs of students.

2.2.3 Interest Theory

Interest Theory posits that interest plays a pivotal role in motivating students, influencing their engagement, and ultimately enhancing learning outcomes. Interest is often regarded as a key driver in the learning process, serving as both an intrinsic motivator and a vehicle for sustained attention and engagement in educational content. In the context of Social Studies education, interest is particularly important, as it shapes how students relate to the subject, which is often viewed as abstract or irrelevant if not taught in a way that resonates with their experiences and worldviews. This section explores Interest Theory, examining how intrinsic and extrinsic motivation foster students' interest in Social Studies, and the significance of contextualising and making the content relevant to students' lives.

Interest as a Crucial Factor in Motivating Students

Interest is a psychological construct that captures the degree to which individuals are attracted to or engaged by a specific subject or activity (Lazarides et al., 2023). According to Interest Theory, students are more likely to engage with learning materials when they find them personally meaningful and stimulating. In Social Studies, the motivation to engage with topics like history, geography, civics, and economics largely depends on the degree to which students feel connected to the subject matter. Interest is, therefore, a critical component of effective teaching, as it not only motivates students to learn but also enhances their ability to retain and apply knowledge.

Research has consistently shown that interest in a subject positively influences academic performance (Renninger & Hidi, 2015). When students are interested in what they are learning, they are more likely to invest effort, engage in deep learning, and develop a sustained commitment to the subject. In contrast, when interest is low, students may engage in superficial learning, relying on rote memorisation or disengaging entirely from the content (Lazarides et al., 2023). In Social Studies, a subject that deals with complex social, political, and historical issues, student interest can significantly affect how effectively students understand and apply these concepts. For example, if students do not find the study of history or geography interesting, they may fail to appreciate the significance of these subjects in understanding current events or their roles as citizens in a democratic society.

Interest also acts as a mediator between the learning environment and academic achievement. An environment that fosters students' interest is likely to lead to increased motivation, which in turn enhances learning outcomes. Teachers can cultivate such an environment by employing strategies that connect the content to students' lives, engage them in interactive and inquiry-based learning, and allow them to take ownership of their learning process (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). Thus, understanding how to foster and maintain students' interest in Social Studies is essential for improving learning outcomes in the subject.

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation in Social Studies

Interest Theory differentiates between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, both of which influence students' interest in learning, but in different ways. Intrinsic motivation refers to doing something for its inherent enjoyment or satisfaction, while extrinsic motivation involves engaging in an activity for external rewards or to avoid

negative consequences (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In the context of Social Studies, both types of motivation play crucial roles in fostering students' interest in the subject, but intrinsic motivation is considered more sustainable and effective in the long term.

Intrinsic motivation in Social Studies is fostered when students find the subject personally meaningful and relevant. When students perceive the material as valuable and related to their everyday lives or future aspirations, they are more likely to engage with it deeply. For instance, students might find learning about social justice, human rights, or democracy interesting if they understand how these topics affect their own communities or the world. This sense of relevance and connection encourages students to participate actively in learning activities and to seek out more information beyond the textbook.

Moreover, when teachers design lessons that are student-centered and allow for exploration, inquiry, and critical thinking, they create an environment that supports intrinsic motivation. For example, organising a debate on current political issues or encouraging students to analyse case studies related to social issues can foster students' natural curiosity and passion for the subject. By involving students in real-world contexts and discussions, teachers can spark their intrinsic motivation to engage with Social Studies and develop critical life skills.

Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is driven by external rewards or pressures, such as grades, teacher approval, or societal expectations. In many education systems, including Ghana, extrinsic factors like the examination system play a significant role in motivating students (Angyagre, 2020). However, while extrinsic motivation can be an initial trigger for engagement, it tends to be less effective in promoting deep learning or sustained interest in the subject. For instance, when students are motivated

primarily by the desire to score well on exams, they may focus more on memorising facts and less on understanding the underlying concepts and broader issues in Social Studies.

While extrinsic motivation cannot be entirely disregarded, it is important for teachers to balance it with strategies that foster intrinsic motivation. For example, teachers might offer rewards for effort and improvement rather than just for correct answers, helping to shift the focus from external validation to internal satisfaction and personal growth. The goal is to create a learning environment where students feel motivated not only by grades or external rewards but also by a genuine interest in understanding the subject matter.

Relevance and Contextualisation of Social Studies Content

The role of relevance and contextualisation in fostering student interest in Social Studies cannot be overstated. Interest Theory emphasises that students are more likely to engage with content that they perceive as meaningful and connected to their own experiences. In Social Studies, this means that teaching content should be contextualised to reflect students' lived realities, communities, and the challenges they face in their daily lives. When students see how historical events, social systems, and political processes shape their lives and societies, they are more likely to find the subject interesting and relevant.

In Ghana, where students may not see a direct link between the content taught in Social Studies and their personal lives, it is crucial to contextualise the curriculum to their socio-cultural and political environment. For example, instead of focusing solely on abstract theories of democracy, teachers can relate these concepts to students' understanding of local governance and their role as active citizens in their

communities. Similarly, historical lessons could incorporate local history and the history of Ghana's independence movement, connecting students to their national identity and the historical context of their present-day social and political structures.

Contextualising the curriculum can also involve connecting Social Studies to contemporary issues such as climate change, poverty, or global conflicts, which are often more relevant and engaging for students. By addressing global issues that students encounter in their daily lives, either directly or through media, teachers can help students make meaningful connections between Social Studies content and their broader understanding of the world.

2.2.4 Self-Efficacy Theory in Teaching and Learning

Self-efficacy Theory, developed by Albert Bandura, is a cornerstone of motivation research in educational psychology. According to Bandura (1977), self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to execute tasks or achieve goals within a particular domain. In the context of teaching and learning, teacher self-efficacy which refers to the belief that teachers can effectively instruct and positively influence their students, has a direct impact on their instructional methods and, consequently, on student outcomes. Teachers' self-efficacy has been shown to influence student motivation, engagement, and interest in subjects like Social Studies. This section explored the role of teacher self-efficacy in fostering student engagement and subject interest, with an emphasis on the implications of Bandura's theory in the context of JHS in Ghana.

Teacher Self-Efficacy and Its Impact on Student Engagement

Teacher self-efficacy is foundational in shaping the classroom environment and instructional strategies. According to Bandura (1997), individuals with higher self-

efficacy are more likely to engage in activities with perseverance and resilience, and they are better equipped to cope with challenges. When teachers believe in their ability to teach effectively, they are more likely to employ innovative teaching methods, remain motivated in the face of obstacles, and maintain high expectations for their students. In contrast, teachers with low self-efficacy may struggle to adapt to their teaching methods, become easily discouraged by setbacks, and convey lower expectations to their students (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

In Social Studies education, teacher self-efficacy can have a profound impact on student engagement. Social Studies is a subject that covers a wide range of complex and often controversial topics, including historical events, social systems, political structures, and global issues. For students to engage meaningfully with such topics, teachers must present these issues in a manner that connects with students' interests and experiences. Teachers with high self-efficacy are more likely to incorporate student-centered teaching methods, such as inquiry-based learning, discussions, group projects, and critical thinking activities that make the subject matter more engaging and relevant to students (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). Furthermore, teachers who believe in their ability to create an inclusive and supportive classroom environment are better able to accommodate the diverse needs of students, fostering a climate where all students feel motivated to participate.

Conversely, when teachers lack self-efficacy, they may default to traditional, teacher-centered methods, such as rote memorisation or lectures, which can lead to disengagement and a lack of interest in the subject matter. In the case of Social Studies, this can lead students to view the subject as irrelevant or monotonous, potentially contributing to the low levels of student interest that are observed in many

classrooms. Research has shown that teachers with high self-efficacy in their teaching practice are more likely to create a classroom environment that encourages active participation and engagement, which, in turn, has been linked to improved academic outcomes and student motivation (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998).

Link Between Teacher Self-Efficacy, Student Motivation, and Subject Interest

The link between teacher self-efficacy and student motivation is well-established in literature. Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory suggests that teachers' beliefs in their instructional abilities influence not only their teaching practices but also the motivation and engagement of their students. Students are highly susceptible to the enthusiasm, confidence, and attitudes of their teachers, and teachers with strong self-efficacy are better able to foster motivation in their students (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Specifically, teacher self-efficacy affects how teachers approach the learning process, manage the classroom, and interact with students, all of which contribute to students' interest in the subject matter.

When teachers are confident in their abilities, they are more likely to employ diverse and engaging teaching strategies that appeal to students' interests and learning preferences. For instance, teachers with high self-efficacy might use real-world examples, current events, or culturally relevant materials to make Social Studies content more relatable to students. This approach not only stimulates intrinsic motivation, where students engage with the subject for its own inherent value, but also increases extrinsic motivation, as students recognise the practical relevance of the material (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2008).

The role of teacher self-efficacy extends to fostering students' self-efficacy beliefs as well. When students experience success in the classroom, particularly through activities that challenge their thinking and encourage active participation, they are likely to develop stronger beliefs in their own abilities. This, in turn, fosters a cycle of motivation and engagement, where students feel more competent and confident in their ability to learn, which increases their interest in the subject (Zimmerman, 2000). Therefore, teacher self-efficacy is not only important for delivering effective instruction, but it also plays a critical role in shaping how students perceive their own abilities and their interest in the subject matter.

In the case of Social Studies, a subject that aims to foster critical thinking, citizenship, and problem-solving skills, teacher self-efficacy is particularly crucial. When teachers believe that they can effectively teach these complex, abstract concepts, they are more likely to present Social Studies content in a way that encourages critical analysis and discussions, both of which are essential for developing informed and active citizens (Shulman, 1987). Through the application of inquiry-based approaches, debates, case studies, and group work, teachers can create an engaging environment where students are motivated to think critically about social issues and their role in society.

Furthermore, teachers with strong self-efficacy are more likely to encourage student autonomy, allowing students to take ownership of their learning by asking questions, exploring topics of personal interest, and collaborating with peers. Such autonomy fosters a deeper sense of interest and engagement, as students feel that they have some control over their learning and are involved in meaningful, relevant tasks.

Implications for Social Studies Education in Ghana

In the context of Junior High Schools in Ghana, fostering teacher self-efficacy has profound implications for improving student interest and engagement in Social Studies. In many cases, teachers are faced with large class sizes, limited resources, and a curriculum that may not fully resonate with students' lived experiences. However, even in such challenging circumstances, teachers with strong self-efficacy are better equipped to engage students in Social Studies and make the content more relevant and interesting. By utilising creative teaching methods, encouraging student involvement, and establishing a classroom environment that values inquiry and critical thinking, teachers can mitigate some of the challenges posed by the curriculum and foster greater interest in the subject.

Professional development programmes that focus on enhancing teachers' self-efficacy could play a significant role in improving teaching practices and student engagement in Social Studies. Providing teachers with the tools, strategies, and confidence to implement student-centered pedagogies, despite the challenges they face, could help bridge the gap between the intended goals of the Social Studies curriculum and students' actual engagement with the subject.

2.2.5 Pedagogical Content Knowledge (Shulman's Framework)

Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), a concept introduced by Lee Shulman in the 1980s, is central to understanding effective teaching, particularly in complex subjects like Social Studies. Shulman's framework emphasises the integration of content knowledge (CK) and pedagogy knowledge (PK), arguing that teachers must not only possess deep knowledge of the subject they teach but also the skills to present this content in ways that are accessible, engaging, and comprehensible to students

(Shulman, 1987). In the context of Social Studies education, PCK is crucial for bridging the gap between what students are expected to learn and how they are taught. This section explores how Shulman's concept of PCK applies to Social Studies, highlighting the importance of teachers' content knowledge and their ability to convey that knowledge effectively to students. Additionally, it examines the gap between teachers' subject knowledge and their pedagogical skills, particularly in creating engaging and meaningful lessons.

The Role of Content Knowledge and Pedagogical Skills in Social Studies Education

Shulman's (1987) framework of PCK suggests that effective teaching occurs when teachers have a deep understanding of both the content they are teaching and the most effective methods for teaching that content. For Social Studies teachers, this means possessing a thorough understanding of the subject's content, which includes historical facts, geographical concepts, civic knowledge, and social systems, and knowing how to present this content in ways that engage students and facilitate learning.

Content knowledge in Social Studies is multifaceted, encompassing topics such as history, government, economics, culture, and geography. Social Studies teachers are tasked with presenting complex and sometimes abstract concepts in a way that is relevant and meaningful to students. For example, understanding how historical events such as the Ghanaian independence movement relate to contemporary social and political issues is essential for teachers to explain the significance of these events to students. Teachers must also recognise the importance of developing students'

critical thinking skills, as the subject encourages inquiry, analysis, and reflection on social issues.

Pedagogical Content Knowledge, however, goes beyond having content expertise. It involves understanding how to transform this knowledge into teachable content. A teacher with strong PCK not only knows the facts and theories but also has the pedagogical skills to make these concepts accessible, engaging, and relevant to students' lives. In Social Studies, this might involve using storytelling techniques to bring historical events to life, employing multimedia resources to make abstract concepts like economic systems more tangible, or creating interactive lessons that encourage students to analyse current social and political issues. Shulman (1987) noted that the most effective teachers are those who can combine these elements seamlessly, creating lessons that both impart knowledge and foster deeper learning.

For example, when teaching democracy, a teacher with strong PCK would not only explain the theoretical foundations of democratic systems but also help students see how democracy functions in their own country or community. This may involve analysing local elections, studying political parties, or exploring the role of citizens in shaping government policy. Teachers with high PCK know how to make the learning process dynamic and relevant to the students' immediate context, helping them develop a deeper understanding of the subject.

The Gap Between Content Knowledge and Pedagogical Skills

One of the challenges identified in literature is the gap between teachers' content knowledge and their pedagogical skills in Social Studies. While teachers may possess strong academic qualifications in the subject area, they may lack the pedagogical

training necessary to deliver that content effectively (Shulman, 1987). This gap can have significant implications for student engagement and learning outcomes.

In many cases, Social Studies teachers are trained in the subject area but not necessarily in effective teaching strategies or how to engage students with the content. For example, a teacher who is an expert in history may understand the significance of a historical event like the abolition of slavery, but they may struggle to design lessons that engage students with this material in a meaningful way. Without the pedagogical tools to make the content engaging, the lesson may fail to capture students' interest or lead to deeper understanding. In the context of Social Studies, this is especially problematic, as the subject requires students to engage with complex social issues, historical events, and geographical concepts in ways that demand critical thinking and personal reflection.

Furthermore, a teacher's ability to assess and adjust their teaching strategies to meet students' needs is integral to the application of PCK. For instance, teachers must be able to identify when students are struggling with certain concepts and adjust their teaching approach accordingly. A teacher who only knows the content deeply but lacks the skills to monitor student comprehension and adapt lessons may fail to ensure that all students grasp the material. This disconnect between content knowledge and pedagogical skills is often exacerbated in large class settings, such as those commonly found in Ghanaian Junior High Schools, where teachers are faced with multiple students at different levels of understanding.

The gap in PCK also arises from a lack of professional development opportunities for teachers. While many Social Studies teachers are highly knowledgeable in their field, ongoing professional development in pedagogical methods can help them refine their

teaching strategies and improve student engagement. Research by Vettriselvan et al. (2025) suggests that teachers with well-developed PCK are more adept at selecting appropriate teaching methods, presenting material in a coherent manner, and addressing the diverse needs of students. Without continuous professional development focused on teaching practices and curriculum design, teachers may find it difficult to bridge the gap between content knowledge and pedagogical effectiveness.

Implications for Social Studies Teaching in Ghana

In the context of Junior High Schools in the New Juaben North Municipality and other regions of Ghana, the gap between content knowledge and pedagogical skills in Social Studies is a significant concern. Social Studies, as a subject that deals with complex social, historical, and political issues, demands not only a thorough understanding of the content but also the ability to present this material in a way that resonates with students' lives and experiences. Teachers must be able to contextualise the content and make it relevant to the students' socio-cultural and political context, ensuring that lessons are not just informative but also engaging.

To address this gap, educational policies should emphasise the importance of enhancing teachers' pedagogical content knowledge, with a focus on integrating both content mastery and effective teaching strategies. This could involve providing teachers with professional development programmes that emphasise the teaching of Social Studies content using student-centered approaches, inquiry-based learning, and interactive teaching strategies. Additionally, curricula should be designed to include not only content but also explicit guidance on how to teach the content effectively.

For example, teacher training programmes could include case studies, role-playing exercises, and other practical methods for teaching complex Social Studies topics.

By bridging the gap between content knowledge and pedagogical skills, teachers can create more engaging, relevant, and effective Social Studies lessons that foster critical thinking, civic engagement, and a deeper understanding of social issues among students.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study explored the foundational elements of Social Studies education, focusing on its definition, objectives, and pedagogical approaches, while examining how these components interact to influence student engagement, interest, and learning outcomes within the Junior High School context in the New Juaben North Municipality.

2.3.1 Conceptualisation of Social Studies Education

Social Studies is a multifaceted discipline that draws from a variety of academic fields such as history, geography, political science, economics, sociology, and anthropology, among others. This interdisciplinary nature allows Social Studies to offer students a comprehensive understanding of the social, cultural, political, and economic forces that shape the world around them. At the JHS level, Social Studies is not merely an accumulation of facts but is designed to foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and citizenship, enabling students to navigate the complexities of contemporary life. In this section, we explore the definition of Social Studies, its interdisciplinary foundation, and its role in developing civic responsibility, critical thinking, and practical life skills.

Defining Social Studies and Its Interdisciplinary Nature

The definition of Social Studies has evolved over time, but at its core, the discipline can be understood as the study of human society and the interaction between individuals, communities, and the broader world. Social Studies aims to equip students with knowledge about human behaviours, societal structures, and global interconnectedness, while encouraging them to understand, evaluate, and engage with the world around them (Zong, 2022). According to Swan et al. (2013), Social Studies is “the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence.” This definition underscores the subject’s interdisciplinary nature, as it seeks to provide students with a holistic understanding of how historical, geographical, political, and economic processes influence human societies.

At the JHS level, this interdisciplinary approach is essential for encouraging students to make connections between different domains of knowledge and to view societal issues from multiple perspectives. For instance, a topic like “Globalisation” in the Social Studies curriculum may touch on economic principles (economics), the movement of people (geography), the impact of technology (history and technology), and cultural exchange (sociology and anthropology). This integration helps students understand that complex societal issues cannot be understood in isolation but require a broader, more interconnected approach. By blending content from various disciplines, Social Studies enables students to engage in critical thinking, an essential skill for their academic and civic lives.

The interdisciplinary nature of Social Studies has implications for how it is taught and perceived. According to Evans (2004), teaching Social Studies as an interdisciplinary subject encourages active learning, where students are required to analyse and

synthesise information from diverse fields, enabling them to approach problems holistically. This approach contrasts with a fragmented or siloed understanding of knowledge that is often associated with traditional subject-based teaching. However, the challenge remains in effectively integrating these disciplines, particularly in contexts where resources or training for teachers may be limited. Thus, for Social Studies to fulfill its potential as an interdisciplinary subject, teachers must have both the content knowledge and pedagogical skills to bridge disciplines in a way that enhances student learning.

The Role of Social Studies in Fostering Civic Responsibility

One of the primary objectives of Social Studies education is to cultivate responsible, informed, and active citizens. Social Studies is viewed as a vehicle for promoting civic responsibility by equipping students with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to participate effectively in democratic societies (Levstik & Barton, 2022). In Ghana, as in many other countries, Social Studies serves as the cornerstone of civic education, with the goal of developing students who are not only academically proficient but also socially and politically engaged.

The importance of civic education in Social Studies cannot be overstated. According to the CRDD (2007), Social Studies aims to “foster responsible citizenship” by teaching students about their rights, duties, and responsibilities within society. This involves not only understanding the structure of government and the rule of law but also appreciating the values of democracy, human rights, and social justice. The study of Social Studies encourages students to critically engage with political and social issues, enabling them to participate meaningfully in debates on national and global concerns. Through topics such as government systems, national development, and

environmental sustainability, Social Studies instils a sense of civic duty, encouraging students to become proactive agents of change in their communities and beyond.

In Ghana, where democracy is still in its relatively early stages compared to some Western nations, the role of Social Studies in promoting civic responsibility is particularly crucial. The nation's Social Studies curriculum is designed to provide students with a foundational understanding of democratic principles and practices, preparing them to be informed voters and participants in governance. However, for this goal to be realised, the curriculum must not only provide theoretical knowledge but also engage students in practical experiences, such as discussions, debates, and community service projects, that enable them to apply what they have learned in real-world settings.

Moreover, studies have shown that students who engage in Social Studies with a clear emphasis on civic education are more likely to exhibit prosocial behaviours, such as volunteering, voting, and participating in community initiatives (Campbell, 2019). These findings underscore the potential impact of Social Studies on shaping students' values and actions, influencing their involvement in both local and global civic life. However, fostering civic responsibility also requires that the curriculum is engaging and relevant to students' lives, which can be a challenge in contexts where the curriculum is perceived as outdated or disconnected from students' daily experiences (Levstik & Barton, 2022).

The Role of Social Studies in Fostering Critical Thinking

Another significant role of Social Studies education is the development of critical thinking skills. Critical thinking is the ability to analyse, evaluate, and synthesise information in a thoughtful and systematic manner. It involves questioning

assumptions, considering multiple perspectives, and drawing reasoned conclusions based on evidence. Social Studies, with its emphasis on historical, political, and social analysis, provides an ideal platform for nurturing these skills. By engaging with issues such as human rights, social justice, inequality, and environmental challenges, students are encouraged to think critically about the causes and consequences of social phenomena.

A major focus of the Social Studies curriculum in Ghana, as outlined by the CRDD (2007), is to develop students' ability to engage in critical thinking. This involves helping students move beyond memorising facts and figures by engaging in deeper analysis of the forces shaping societies. For example, students might study the impact of colonialism on African countries or analyse contemporary issues such as climate change, using evidence from history, geography, and social sciences to understand the broader implications of these topics. By cultivating critical thinking, Social Studies enables students to become independent thinkers who can evaluate the validity of information, make informed decisions, and contribute to discussions about societal challenges.

However, fostering critical thinking in Social Studies classrooms is not without its challenges. Teachers must be equipped with the appropriate instructional strategies to engage students in critical analysis. Simply presenting facts about a particular topic does little to promote critical thinking. Instead, students must be encouraged to ask questions, engage in debates, and consider diverse perspectives. For instance, when discussing political systems, students should be encouraged to critically examine the strengths and weaknesses of different governance structures and consider the implications for social equity and justice. Teachers must also provide opportunities

for students to apply their critical thinking skills in real-world contexts, such as case studies, community projects, or role-playing activities.

Furthermore, a focus on critical thinking in Social Studies can help students to challenge stereotypes, reduce prejudices, and appreciate cultural diversity. In an increasingly globalised world, these skills are essential not only for academic success but also for building socially responsible individuals who can navigate complex global issues with empathy and understanding.

The Role of Social Studies in Developing Practical Life Skills

In addition to fostering civic responsibility and critical thinking, Social Studies also plays a crucial role in developing practical life skills that students need to succeed in their personal and professional lives. Social Studies education provides students with a toolkit of skills that are essential for functioning effectively in society, including problem-solving, communication, collaboration, and decision-making. These skills are transferable across a wide range of careers and are valuable in day-to-day interactions in the community. For example, learning about economics and budgeting in Social Studies enables students to manage their personal finances effectively, while studying geography and environmental science helps students understand the importance of sustainable living practices.

Moreover, practical life skills are particularly important in the Ghanaian context, where youth unemployment is a significant issue. The study of Social Studies can help students understand the value of entrepreneurship, the role of government in economic development, and the importance of social networks and cooperation. By exploring these concepts, students are better prepared to make informed decisions regarding their careers and contributions to society. Social Studies curricula that

integrate skills-based learning are particularly effective in promoting practical, real-world applications of knowledge.

The conceptualisation of Social Studies education is anchored in its interdisciplinary nature, its emphasis on fostering civic responsibility, its role in developing critical thinking, and its contribution to practical life skills. As an interdisciplinary subject, Social Studies connects multiple fields of study, offering students a comprehensive understanding of the world around them. More than just a collection of facts, Social Studies aims to equip students with the intellectual and practical tools they need to be active, informed citizens. The role of Social Studies in shaping students' civic values, critical thinking abilities, and life skills is crucial in preparing them for the complexities of modern society. However, for these goals to be realised, the subject must be taught in a way that is engaging, relevant, and responsive to the needs of students.

2.3.2 Goal, Rationale and Purpose of Social Studies at JHS

Social Studies at the Junior High School (JHS) level plays a fundamental role in preparing students for responsible, active participation in society. Through its interdisciplinary approach, Social Studies aims to equip students with the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes to become informed and engaged citizens, capable of addressing the complex social, political, economic, and environmental challenges that characterise modern societies. This section will re-examine the intended goals, rationale, and purpose of Social Studies education at the JHS level, as outlined in Ghana's national curriculum, and analyse how these goals are reflected in, or diverge from, current pedagogical practices in the New Juaben North Municipality.

Goals of Social Studies Education

At its core, Social Studies aims to develop students' understanding of the world around them, instilling the critical competencies required for responsible citizenship and participation in democratic processes. According to the CRDD (2007), the primary goal of Social Studies at the JHS level is to foster a sense of social responsibility by enabling students to understand the structures and dynamics of society, the environment, and the economy. The subject's interdisciplinary nature seeks to develop a comprehensive understanding of the world, where students can connect knowledge across disciplines such as history, geography, economics, and civics. This approach is intended to not only impart factual knowledge but also nurture critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and the ability to evaluate and respond to complex issues affecting local and global communities.

One of the most critical goals of Social Studies is to prepare students for active participation in democratic society. The subject is designed to help students appreciate the principles of democracy, human rights, and social justice, while also encouraging them to engage in societal issues and become responsible and active citizens. In Ghana, as in other democracies, Social Studies plays a key role in shaping students' political awareness and understanding of democratic processes, thereby preparing them for their roles as voters, community leaders, and informed decision-makers. In particular, it emphasises the importance of democratic values such as equality, freedom, justice, and the rule of law, which are essential in sustaining a peaceful and stable society.

Another key goal of Social Studies is to develop students' problem-solving skills and their ability to make informed decisions based on evidence. Social Studies encourages

students to explore and analyse real-world issues, ranging from local community problems to global challenges such as climate change, poverty, and conflict, equipping them with the cognitive tools to propose viable solutions. This focus on problem-solving aligns with the broader educational aim of preparing students to tackle the challenges they will face as adults, whether in their personal, professional, or civic lives.

In addition to these cognitive and civic objectives, Social Studies also aims to nurture social cohesion and cultural awareness. By engaging with topics such as national history, traditions, and the cultures of various ethnic groups, Social Studies fosters respect for diversity and promotes national unity. This goal is particularly important in multicultural societies like Ghana, where students from different ethnic backgrounds and regions must learn to understand and appreciate one another's differences in order to contribute to social harmony and national development.

The Rationale for Social Studies Education

The rationale for Social Studies at the JHS level is grounded in the belief that education is a powerful tool for social transformation. Social Studies is intended not only to educate students about their immediate surroundings but also to prepare them for the broader world. In Ghana, where the country's development depends on active citizen participation in governance, social responsibility, and economic development, Social Studies plays a crucial role in shaping future leaders who are both knowledgeable and ethically committed to serving their communities.

As outlined in Ghana's educational reforms, Social Studies seeks to address national developmental challenges by developing students who are aware of the pressing issues facing the country. These issues, which range from environmental

sustainability to social inequality, require a generation of young people who are equipped to engage in informed discussions and contribute to finding solutions. By helping students connect theoretical knowledge with real-world applications, Social Studies prepares them for a range of careers in fields such as government, social services, international relations, and environmental sustainability.

Social Studies is also regarded as an essential tool for fostering national cohesion and unity. As Ghana is a nation with over 60 ethnic groups, many of which have distinct languages, cultures, and traditions, Social Studies provides an avenue for students to explore the richness of their nation's diversity. Through studying the history, culture, and values of Ghana, students develop a deeper sense of belonging to the nation, which is crucial for maintaining social harmony and peaceful coexistence. In a multicultural society like Ghana, this is an essential foundation for both personal identity and national unity.

Purpose of Social Studies at the JHS Level

The purpose of Social Studies at JHS is to provide students with the knowledge, skills, and values required for responsible and active citizenship, while simultaneously preparing them to address the real-world challenges facing both their communities and the world at large. Social Studies at this level serves as a bridge between primary education and more specialised subjects at the senior high school (SHS) level, laying the groundwork for further academic study while simultaneously addressing the practical needs of the students. The purpose of Social Studies is not simply to transfer knowledge but to engage students in an ongoing process of inquiry, where they develop the ability to analyse, evaluate, and apply information meaningfully.

At the JHS level, the focus of Social Studies is to cultivate informed citizens who are prepared to take on leadership roles in their communities. These students should be capable of participating in democratic decision-making, contributing to national development, and solving complex social problems through collaboration and innovation. As such, the subject not only deals with the intellectual aspects of education but also with the formation of character and values.

Analysis of Pedagogical Practices and Reflection of Goals

Despite the clear and compelling goals outlined for Social Studies at the JHS level, the extent to which these objectives are reflected in current pedagogical practices can be called into question. In many instances, Social Studies is still taught in a traditional manner, with a heavy reliance on rote memorisation of facts and figures, rather than fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Ghana Education Service, 2020). For example, students may be asked to memorise historical dates, names, and events without being given the opportunity to engage deeply with the causes, consequences, and broader significance of these events. This approach undermines the very goals of Social Studies, which seek to encourage students to think critically and analytically about society and its challenges.

Furthermore, many teachers in the New Juaben North Municipality may lack the necessary training or resources to implement more interactive, student-centered approaches that could better align with the goals of the curriculum. Inadequate resources, such as textbooks, teaching materials, and access to technology, often limit teachers' ability to create dynamic learning environments where students can explore real-world problems and develop their critical thinking skills. The lack of professional development opportunities for teachers also means that many may not be equipped

with the latest pedagogical strategies that foster active engagement and problem-solving. This disconnect between the curriculum's goals and the methods used to teach the subject reflects a broader issue in educational practice, where systemic challenges such as large class sizes, underfunded schools, and insufficient teacher training compromise the effectiveness of Social Studies education.

Additionally, the perceived lack of relevance of Social Studies to students' lives can further diminish interest and engagement. If students do not see the subject as directly connected to their experiences or the challenges they face in their communities, they may not fully appreciate its importance in their lives. For instance, while Social Studies aims to teach students about democracy and governance, many may not have the opportunity to see these concepts in action through civic engagement or practical activities such as voting or community service projects. As a result, students may fail to make the connection between classroom learning and real-world application, further undermining the subject's intended goals of fostering civic responsibility and active participation.

2.3.3 Nature of Social Studies at JHS

The nature of Social Studies education at the Junior High School (JHS) level is intricately tied to its broader goals of fostering civic responsibility, critical thinking, and informed decision-making. Social Studies is inherently interdisciplinary, drawing from subjects like history, geography, economics, and political science, with the aim of preparing students to engage with the world around them. At the JHS level, the curriculum is designed to shape students' understanding of social issues, historical events, and their role as responsible, active global citizens. The following section delves into how the JHS Social Studies curriculum is structured to achieve these

objectives and critically examines whether current teaching methods align with the intended aims of the subject.

Focus on Shaping Students' Understanding of Social Issues, Historical Events, and Their Role as Global Citizens

One of the primary goals of Social Studies at the JHS level is to deepen students' understanding of social issues and historical events that have shaped human societies. The curriculum is designed to expose students to a variety of perspectives on key historical, cultural, political, and economic events, helping them to appreciate the complexities and interconnectedness of the world. Social Studies encourages students to look beyond local or national narratives and to engage with global challenges such as climate change, human rights, migration, and poverty, helping them see the larger picture of human development and its impact on the environment and society.

In Ghana, the Social Studies curriculum places a strong emphasis on the historical and socio-political context of the country, encouraging students to explore topics such as colonialism, independence, and national development. Through such topics, students gain insight into the historical forces that have shaped their society and the world at large, which is essential for understanding contemporary social issues. For example, the study of Ghana's independence movement and post-colonial challenges provides students with a sense of national identity, pride, and understanding of the struggles that have shaped their country's development.

Moreover, the curriculum extends beyond national history to encompass global historical events, such as the World Wars, the Cold War, and global movements for social justice, thereby encouraging students to see themselves as part of a broader global community. This focus on global awareness is crucial for developing students

into responsible, informed global citizens who can engage with international issues. As part of the curriculum, students are taught to appreciate diversity, respect human rights, and understand the value of democracy, thus preparing them for active participation in an increasingly interconnected world.

The inclusion of social issues such as gender equality, environmental sustainability, and economic development further reflects the role of Social Studies in shaping students' understanding of current challenges. For instance, the study of topics such as sustainable development, environmental degradation, and global health issues equips students with the knowledge and awareness needed to address these pressing concerns. This aspect of the curriculum promotes critical thinking by encouraging students to explore different solutions to these challenges and to reflect on their role as global citizens.

The Role of Social Studies in Teaching Global Citizenship

The notion of global citizenship is central to the Social Studies curriculum, as it emphasises the interconnectedness of nations and the importance of fostering international understanding, peace, and cooperation. In a globalised world where issues such as climate change, migration, and trade affect multiple countries simultaneously, Social Studies provides students with the tools to understand and navigate these issues. According to Rieckmann (2017), education should empower individuals to participate fully in the life of their communities and the world at large. By studying topics like global governance, international relations, and cultural diversity, students gain the skills to understand their role as global citizens and to take action in response to global issues.

At the JHS level, global citizenship is not just about academic knowledge but also about instilling values such as respect for diversity, tolerance, and empathy. By studying the challenges faced by different countries and cultures, students are encouraged to appreciate the differences between people while recognising their shared humanity. Social Studies, thus, plays a key role in promoting peace, social justice, and human rights, all of which are essential components of global citizenship. In Ghana, this focus on global citizenship is particularly important as it aligns with the country's efforts to foster international relationships and contribute to the global community through various regional and international organisations.

In addition to broadening students' perspectives, Social Studies also helps them to develop critical skills for active citizenship, including participation in democratic processes, advocacy, and social action. By teaching students about their rights, responsibilities, and the mechanisms for influencing public policy, Social Studies prepares them to become informed voters and active participants in civic life. This is particularly important in a democratic country like Ghana, where Social Studies is instrumental in shaping the political consciousness of future generations.

Analysis of Teaching Methods and Alignment with the Nature of the Subject

While the goals and content of the Social Studies curriculum are clearly articulated, the extent to which these objectives are realised in practice depends heavily on the teaching methods employed in the classroom. For Social Studies to effectively shape students' understanding of social issues and historical events, and to prepare them for their roles as global citizens, the teaching methods must be aligned with the interdisciplinary, critical, and values-based nature of the subject.

In Ghana, however, Social Studies instruction is often characterised by traditional teaching methods that focus on rote memorisation and teacher-centered instruction (Fitchett & Heafner, 2022). In many classrooms, teachers still prioritise the transmission of factual information such as dates, events, and definitions rather than fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and real-world applications of knowledge. This is a significant concern, as the goal of Social Studies education is not merely to impart knowledge but to engage students actively in the learning process, enabling them to analyse, question, and connect ideas from multiple disciplines.

Despite the curriculum's emphasis on active engagement, research indicates that teachers often struggle to implement pedagogical practices that promote deep, reflective learning (Angyagre, 2020). This is particularly true in schools with limited resources, where teachers may rely on textbooks and chalkboard instruction rather than interactive learning methods that encourage student participation. The use of case studies, debates, role-playing, and project-based learning which are integral to fostering critical thinking and real-world problem-solving skills remains limited in many classrooms (Phinla, 2024). These limitations can hinder students' ability to apply their knowledge to real-world situations and can affect their overall interest in the subject.

Furthermore, the emphasis on examinations and standardised testing often undermines the teaching of Social Studies as a subject that should stimulate critical thought and creativity. The examination-oriented approach tends to prioritise factual recall rather than the development of analytical skills or the exploration of complex social issues. As a result, students may perceive Social Studies as a subject that is detached from their daily lives and future roles as active citizens.

To align the teaching methods with the interdisciplinary and critical nature of Social Studies, there is a need for more interactive and student-centered approaches. This includes the integration of inquiry-based learning, collaborative activities, field trips, and the use of technology to facilitate deeper engagement with real-world social issues. For instance, teachers can encourage students to work on projects related to local or global challenges, such as climate change, human rights, or poverty, which would allow them to apply their knowledge in practical ways. Such methods would help students understand the relevance of Social Studies to their lives and prepare them to take informed actions as global citizens.

2.3.4 Graphical Representation of Conceptual Framework

The flowchart-style conceptual framework diagram below visually represents the key components influencing students' interest in Social Studies within the context of Ghana's Junior High Schools. The diagram outlines the relationships between various elements that shape students' engagement with the subject and their learning outcomes. The flowchart cascades downward in a clear sequence, starting with overarching curriculum reforms and moving through the stages of pedagogy, student engagement, resources, and context, culminating in student learning outcomes.

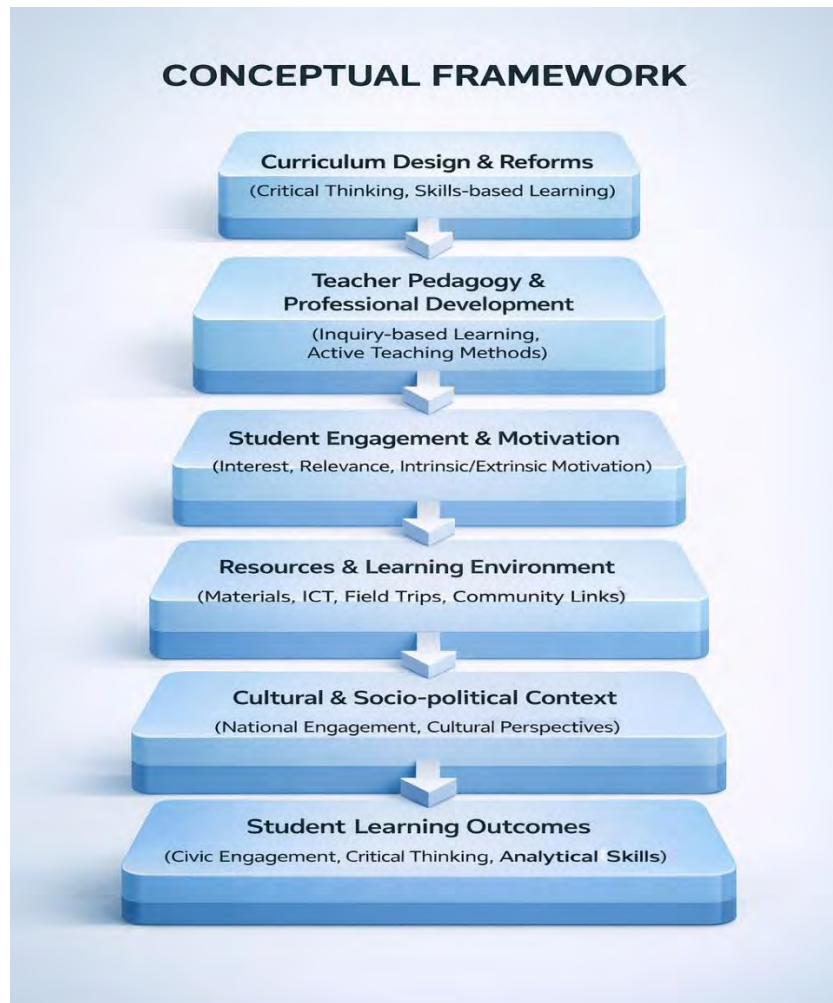


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework for Enhancing Student Engagement in Social Studies

At the top of the framework is the Curriculum Design and Reforms, which serve as the foundation for the study. This component emphasises the recent shift in the Social Studies curriculum in Ghana from a focus on rote memorisation to a more skills-based, analytical approach. The curriculum now prioritises critical thinking, problem-solving, and skills development, which are essential for fostering active citizenship and informed participation in society. This aligns with global educational trends that promote deeper engagement with content rather than passive recall. The curriculum's design is intended to empower students by encouraging them to actively question, analyse, and connect their learning to real-world issues, making Social Studies more relevant and engaging.

Beneath the curriculum design, the framework includes Teacher Pedagogy and Professional Development, which focuses on the instructional methods and teacher expertise required to implement the revised curriculum effectively. The shift towards a more student-centered approach calls for teachers to adopt inquiry-based learning, active teaching methods, and learner-centered strategies that engage students in critical thinking and problem-solving tasks. This component highlights the need for teacher training and professional development, ensuring that educators have the necessary pedagogical skills to facilitate these new approaches. Without adequate teacher support and training, the curriculum's goals cannot be fully realised in the classroom.

Next, the framework focuses on Student Engagement and Motivation, which is crucial in determining how students perceive and interact with Social Studies. The shift to skills-based learning depends largely on the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of students. Motivation is influenced by how relevant students find the subject to their own lives, and whether they feel personally connected to the material. When students recognise the practical applications of what they are learning, they are more likely to engage actively with the content. Additionally, fostering a positive attitude towards Social Studies requires creating a learning environment where students feel empowered and interested in the subject matter, which can be facilitated through innovative and dynamic teaching methods.

The Resources and Learning Environment component emphasises the critical role of teaching materials and classroom resources in shaping student engagement. These include access to ICT, field trips, community resources, and multimedia that can make learning more interactive and contextually relevant. When students are exposed

to real-world materials and experiences, such as interacting with community members, visiting historical sites, or utilising technology, they are more likely to see the value of Social Studies. The framework suggests that inadequate resources or limited access to such tools can hinder student interest and diminish the effectiveness of the curriculum. For the new curriculum to succeed, it must be supported by these external resources to enrich students' learning experiences.

The framework also underscores the importance of the Cultural and Socio-political Context in shaping how students engage with Social Studies. Understanding students' cultural backgrounds and the socio-political environment they inhabit plays a vital role in how they connect to the subject matter. Issues such as national engagement, diversity, and cultural perspectives affect how students perceive the relevance of the curriculum. In a multi-ethnic and diverse society like Ghana, fostering a sense of national unity and promoting understanding among different cultural groups is essential. Social Studies can be a powerful tool in this regard, enabling students to understand and appreciate the socio-political complexities of their nation, thus preparing them to be active, informed citizens.

Finally, the ultimate goal of the Social Studies curriculum is reflected in Student Learning Outcomes, which include the development of civic engagement, critical thinking, and analytical skills. These outcomes represent the end result of the interactions between the curriculum design, pedagogy, resources, and socio-cultural context. The framework suggests that through the appropriate teaching methods, engagement, and resources, students should be equipped to think critically about social issues, understand the importance of active citizenship, and apply their learning

to solve real-world problems. These outcomes are essential for preparing students to contribute positively to their communities and the nation at large.

2.4 Curriculum Theory and Design

Curriculum Theory and Design explored the principles and processes involved in creating educational curricula that are both relevant and effective, emphasising the alignment of content, pedagogy, and student needs, with a focus on fostering critical thinking, engagement, and practical skills development in the Social Studies subject.

2.4.1 Curriculum Relevance and Responsiveness

Curriculum relevance and responsiveness are key principles in ensuring that educational programmes meet the needs of students, address contemporary societal issues, and prepare learners for active participation in real-world contexts. In the case of Social Studies education in JHS in Ghana, the curriculum's ability to align with students' interests, respond to their educational needs, and foster the development of critical, analytical skills is a fundamental concern. The Social Studies curriculum is designed to provide students with knowledge about historical, political, social, and economic systems, but its true effectiveness depends on how well it engages students and connects learning to real-life experiences.

The current Social Studies curriculum in Ghana has undergone significant reforms in recent years, shifting from a traditional emphasis on rote memorisation to a more dynamic approach that prioritises the development of practical, analytical skills. Traditionally, Social Studies education was largely focused on students memorising facts, dates, and historical events with little regard for critical thinking or practical application. However, recent reforms emphasise the development of skills such as problem-solving, critical analysis, and citizenship, which are seen as essential for

preparing students to engage with the complexities of the modern world (Abudu, Bariham, & Quansah, 2024). This shift reflects a broader trend in education that recognises the importance of not only transferring knowledge but also fostering the cognitive skills required to navigate and contribute to society.

Despite these efforts to modernise the curriculum, there remain concerns about its relevance to students' interests and real-world issues. In many cases, students perceive Social Studies as a dull or irrelevant subject, largely due to its abstract focus on historical events and theoretical concepts that feel disconnected from their daily lives. Research by Zevin (2015) highlights that students often struggle to relate Social Studies content to their own experiences, making it difficult for them to see the practical value of the subject. For the curriculum to be truly responsive, it must engage students with content that is both meaningful and connected to their socio-cultural context. This includes integrating current events, local history, and contemporary social issues into lessons to make the subject more relevant to students' lives.

Therefore, to enhance curriculum responsiveness, it is crucial to incorporate student interests into the design of Social Studies programmes. According to Fitzsimons et al. (2020), curriculum designers should focus on adapting content to the local context and incorporating students' experiences into the learning process. Engaging students in the exploration of social issues, political systems, and historical events that shape their immediate environment can foster a greater sense of relevance and promote active learning.

While the current Social Studies curriculum in Ghana represents a step forward in terms of fostering analytical and practical skills, its relevance and responsiveness to

students' needs and interests remain critical areas for improvement. By further aligning curriculum content with real-world issues and student experiences, the subject can be transformed into a more engaging and meaningful learning experience for Junior High School students.

2.4.2 Learner-Centered vs Teacher-Centered Approaches

The distinction between learner-centered and teacher-centered approaches in education has profound implications for student engagement and interest in subjects like Social Studies. Traditionally, many educational systems, including those in Ghana, have emphasised teacher-centered approaches, where the teacher is the primary source of knowledge and authority in the classroom. However, there is growing recognition of the benefits of learner-centered approaches, which shift the focus from the teacher to the student, promoting active learning, critical thinking, and greater student engagement. In the context of Social Studies, a subject that deals with complex social, historical, and political issues, the choice between these pedagogical approaches can significantly impact how students connect with the content and develop an interest in the subject matter.

In a teacher-centered approach, the teacher primarily directs the learning process by delivering content through lectures, textbooks, and other formal methods. Students are typically passive recipients of information, with little opportunity for interaction or exploration. This traditional model, often based on rote memorisation, can make Social Studies seem irrelevant or disengaging, especially when students do not see how the content relates to their lives (Zevin, 2015). For example, when Social Studies lessons focus solely on historical facts or theoretical concepts without context or

active engagement, students may perceive the subject as disconnected from their lived experiences, leading to diminished interest.

On the other hand, learner-centered approaches place the student at the centre of the learning process, emphasising active participation, problem-solving, and inquiry-based learning. In this model, students are encouraged to explore, discuss, and critically analyse the content, making the learning experience more engaging and relevant to their own lives (Vygotsky, 1978). In Social Studies, a learner-centered approach could involve activities such as group discussions on current political events, case studies of local historical events, or collaborative projects that require students to apply social theories to real-world problems. By engaging students in active learning and allowing them to connect the content to their own experiences, a learner-centered approach can foster deeper interest in the subject.

The shift to a more learner-centered approach in Social Studies education has been shown to enhance students' motivation, improve their critical thinking skills, and increase their sense of ownership over their learning. According to Deci and Ryan (2012), when students are given more autonomy and opportunities for self-directed learning, their intrinsic motivation to engage with the content increases. This is particularly relevant for Social Studies, as the subject requires students to critically engage with complex and sometimes contentious social issues. By allowing students to take an active role in their learning, educators can create a more dynamic and engaging classroom environment, leading to greater interest in Social Studies.

While teacher-centered approaches have been prevalent in many educational settings, a shift towards more learner-centered pedagogies can have a significant impact on student interest and engagement in Social Studies. By emphasising active learning,

critical thinking, and student autonomy, a learner-centered approach can make Social Studies more relevant and stimulating for students, fostering greater interest and participation in the subject.

2.4.3 Integrated Curriculum and Its Complexities

An integrated curriculum approach, which combines various disciplines such as history, geography, economics, and civics within the framework of Social Studies, is often seen as a way to provide students with a holistic understanding of the social sciences. However, the implementation of an integrated Social Studies curriculum in JHS presents several challenges, especially when attempting to balance content from these diverse areas while ensuring that students remain engaged and motivated to learn. Despite these challenges, an integrated curriculum also offers the potential to significantly enhance student interest and engagement by presenting real-world issues in a more interconnected and relevant manner.

One of the primary challenges in implementing an integrated Social Studies curriculum is balancing the distinct content areas including history, geography, economics, and civics, while maintaining the integrity of each discipline. Each area has its own set of concepts, terminology, and methods of inquiry, which can make it difficult for teachers to weave these subjects together in a way that is both meaningful and coherent. According to Mason (1996) and Kysilka (1998), one of the difficulties with integrated curricula is ensuring that the content from different disciplines complements rather than overwhelms students, who may struggle to grasp the breadth of knowledge presented. In Social Studies, for example, students may find it challenging to connect historical events with geographical contexts or economic systems, especially if the teaching approach is not carefully planned. Moreover, the

lack of specialised training for teachers in integrating these diverse subjects can further complicate the delivery of such an approach (Shifflet & Hunt, 2019).

Another challenge lies in the need for curriculum designers to create materials and resources that are flexible and adaptable to different classroom settings. As noted by Drake & Reid (2018), the success of an integrated curriculum depends heavily on how well teachers can tailor lessons to students' varying needs, interests, and abilities. Without sufficient resources and professional development, teachers may struggle to effectively integrate content, leading to fragmented lessons that fail to engage students or demonstrate the interconnectedness of social studies subjects.

Despite these challenges, an integrated curriculum has the potential to significantly enhance student interest and engagement in Social Studies. By presenting topics in a way that highlights their connections to real-world issues such as linking economic policies to historical events or examining civic responsibilities through the lens of geography, students can better understand the relevance of what they are learning (Beane, 1993). An integrated approach encourages critical thinking and problem-solving, skills that are essential for students to develop as informed and active citizens. Research by Klopfer et al. (2019) supports the idea that students are more likely to engage with the material when it is presented as a cohesive whole rather than as separate, isolated topics.

In conclusion, while the integration of history, geography, economics, and civics within the Social Studies curriculum presents challenges, the potential benefits such as enhanced student interest, critical thinking, and the development of practical skills make it a worthwhile approach. Overcoming these challenges requires thoughtful

curriculum design, teacher training, and the development of appropriate resources that support an integrated, student-centered learning environment.

2.5 Overview of Social Studies Curriculum

The section explored the evolution, structure, and goals of Social Studies education, highlighting its role in fostering informed, critical, and active citizens through a comprehensive understanding of historical, geographical, political, and economic systems.

2.5.1 International Perspectives on Social Studies Education

Social Studies education worldwide serves as a crucial platform for promoting civic responsibility, critical thinking, and an understanding of historical, geographical, economic, and political systems. While the core objectives of Social Studies are universal, the approaches and implementations vary significantly across countries, with each nation tailoring its curriculum to suit its unique socio-political context and educational priorities. In comparing Social Studies education in Ghana with other countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and other African nations, several key differences and similarities emerge, particularly in the areas of curriculum design, student engagement, and the development of critical thinking skills.

Social Studies Education in Ghana

In Ghana, the Social Studies curriculum aims to equip students with knowledge about their history, geography, governance, and social systems, as well as to foster an understanding of their roles as active and responsible citizens. Recent reforms in the curriculum have focused on shifting away from rote memorisation toward more inquiry-based and critical thinking approaches (Addai-Mununkum & Setordzi, 2023). This shift is intended to foster students' ability to engage with social issues and

participate meaningfully in democratic processes. However, despite these reforms, the curriculum often faces challenges related to its implementation, including a lack of resources, overcrowded classrooms, and limited teacher training in pedagogical strategies that promote student-centered learning (Fufa, Tulu, & Ensene, 2023; Kumar, 2016; Tadesse, 2020). Additionally, while the content is meant to be relevant to students' lives, it is often perceived as abstract and disconnected from their lived experiences, which can undermine student interest.

Social Studies Education in the United States

In the United States, Social Studies education is similarly focused on promoting informed citizenship, with an emphasis on history, civics, geography, and economics. However, the U.S. curriculum places a greater emphasis on fostering critical thinking and analytical skills, with many schools adopting inquiry-based learning models. The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) outlines a framework for Social Studies that includes the development of skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and understanding multiple perspectives on social issues (NCSS, 2018). Many U.S. schools also incorporate project-based learning (PBL), which encourages students to engage with real-world problems and collaborate on solutions. This approach has proven to be effective in fostering student engagement, as it connects classroom learning to practical, contemporary issues.

One notable example of successful Social Studies curriculum design in the U.S. is the implementation of the “C3 Framework” for Social Studies State Standards, which emphasises inquiry-based learning and encourages students to explore social issues through questioning, research, and analysis (Herczog, 2013). The focus on inquiry-based learning has been shown to enhance students' interest in the subject, as it makes

learning more relevant and engaging by allowing students to pursue topics they find compelling.

Social Studies Education in the United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom (U.K.), Social Studies is generally taught as part of a broader “Citizenship Education” curriculum, which emphasises the development of students’ knowledge and skills in relation to citizenship, politics, and social issues. The UK curriculum focuses on fostering a sense of belonging and responsibility, both at the national and global levels. According to the U.K.’s Department for Education (DfE), the aim of Social Studies (or Citizenship Education) is to provide students with the skills to actively participate in democratic society and to understand issues such as justice, equality, and human rights (DfE, 2019).

The U.K. has adopted a more prescriptive approach compared to the U.S., with specific learning outcomes related to political literacy, understanding of government systems, and global awareness. However, like in Ghana, one challenge faced by U.K. schools is the balancing of curriculum depth with student engagement, particularly given the complexity of the subject matter and the diversity of students’ backgrounds (Banks, 2020; Shifflet & Hunt, 2019). While the U.K. curriculum encourages critical thinking, there are concerns about its implementation, with teachers sometimes struggling to effectively engage students with the content in a meaningful way.

Social Studies Education in Other African Countries

In other African countries, Social Studies curricula vary, but many nations have adopted models similar to Ghana’s, focusing on history, civics, and geography to foster national identity and civic engagement. For example, in Kenya, the Social Studies curriculum integrates aspects of history, geography, and government, with a

strong emphasis on developing students' understanding of social, political, and economic issues in the context of Kenya's history (Nasibi, 2015). The aim is to foster active participation in societal development and to nurture a sense of national pride.

Similarly, in Nigeria, Social Studies education is integral to the curriculum and focuses on preparing students for active participation in national development. The Nigerian curriculum also emphasises critical thinking and problem-solving, with the goal of fostering civic responsibility and social cohesion (Ekiugbo, 2024). However, like in Ghana, challenges related to teacher preparation, resource limitations, and overcrowded classrooms often undermine the effectiveness of these curricula.

In South Africa, the Social Studies curriculum includes the teaching of history, geography, and economics with a focus on democratic citizenship and nation-building. Post-apartheid educational reforms have emphasised the need for a curriculum that promotes reconciliation, social justice, and critical citizenship (Fogle-Donmoyer, 2017). However, the implementation of these reforms has faced challenges, including insufficient teacher training and a lack of resources to effectively teach these complex issues.

Successful Curriculum Designs and Their Impact on Student Engagement

International examples illustrate the potential benefits of an integrated and inquiry-based approach to Social Studies. In both the U.S. and the U.K., inquiry-based learning frameworks have been successful in fostering student engagement and critical thinking. Similarly, in African countries such as Kenya and Nigeria, curricula that integrate social, political, and economic contexts within the framework of national development have been effective in promoting relevance and engagement. For Ghana, adopting a more inquiry-based and integrated curriculum, as seen in these

international examples, could enhance student interest and engagement by making the content more connected to real-world issues and students' lived experiences.

In conclusion, while Social Studies education in Ghana shares many similarities with international practices, there are distinct challenges related to curriculum implementation and student engagement. However, global examples of successful curriculum designs that emphasise inquiry-based learning, critical thinking, and real-world applications offer valuable insights into how Ghana's Social Studies curriculum can be further developed to enhance student interest and foster deeper learning.

2.5.2 Global Trends in Social Studies Development

The development of Social Studies curricula worldwide is increasingly influenced by global issues such as globalisation, citizenship, and climate change. These contemporary challenges are reshaping how Social Studies is taught, with an emphasis on preparing students not only with factual knowledge but also with the skills necessary to navigate and address these global issues. Additionally, there has been a noticeable trend towards more analytical, inquiry-based learning in Social Studies education, reflecting a shift away from rote memorisation towards fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and active citizenship.

Globalisation and Its Impact on Social Studies Curricula

Globalisation, characterised by the increasing interconnectedness of countries through trade, technology, and cultural exchange, has had a profound impact on Social Studies curricula across the globe. As societies become more interconnected, the need for students to understand global systems, international relations, and cross-cultural interactions has become paramount. In response to this, many countries have revised

their Social Studies curricula to incorporate global issues, promoting a more international perspective on education.

For example, in the United States, the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) emphasises the importance of understanding global systems in its “C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards.” The framework highlights the need for students to engage with global issues such as trade, diplomacy, and human rights, and to understand the interconnectedness of the world’s economic, political, and social systems (NCSS, 2018). Similarly, in European countries, Social Studies curricula increasingly address topics like global justice, human migration, and the effects of globalisation on local communities, fostering a broader awareness of the world beyond national borders (Alazmi, 2022; Tichnor-Wagner et al., 2017).

In Ghana, the recent curriculum reforms also reflect a growing recognition of the need to prepare students to engage with global issues. For instance, the revised Social Studies curriculum encourages students to explore topics related to international relations and global challenges such as poverty, human rights, and environmental sustainability (Addai-Mununkum & Setordzi, 2023). This global approach not only enhances students’ understanding of international issues but also equips them with the tools to act as informed, responsible global citizens.

Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability in Social Studies

Another major global trend influencing Social Studies education is the increasing focus on climate change and environmental sustainability. As concerns over environmental degradation and climate change grow, many educational systems are incorporating these issues into their Social Studies curricula. The aim is to raise

awareness about environmental challenges and encourage students to think critically about sustainable solutions.

In many countries, including Canada and Australia, Social Studies programmes now emphasise environmental studies, integrating them with historical, political, and economic discussions to help students understand the global impact of climate change and the role of policy-making in addressing environmental challenges (Sipos et al., 2017). This approach not only fosters scientific literacy but also encourages students to consider how environmental policies affect society at large, fostering a deeper engagement with the world's most pressing issues.

Trends Toward Analytical and Inquiry-Based Learning

Alongside the incorporation of global issues, there has been a global shift towards more analytical and inquiry-based learning in Social Studies education. This shift is in line with broader educational trends that prioritise critical thinking, problem-solving, and active learning. In many countries, there is a move away from traditional, content-heavy teaching toward methods that encourage students to ask questions, conduct research, and analyse social issues from multiple perspectives.

In the U.S., the “C3 Framework” promotes inquiry-based learning by encouraging students to engage in a cycle of questioning, researching, analysing, and communicating findings about real-world problems (Herczog, 2013). This method not only helps students develop analytical skills but also enhances their ability to think critically about the world around them. Similarly, in the U.K., there is an increasing emphasis on student-led inquiry within the context of Social Studies education, where students are encouraged to critically assess issues such as inequality, justice, and democracy through discussion and research.

In Ghana, the recent revisions to the Social Studies curriculum reflect a similar trend, with an emphasis on developing students' inquiry skills and encouraging them to engage critically with the subject matter. For instance, the introduction of inquiry-based strategies is designed to move students beyond memorising facts to actively engaging with social issues and contributing to the solution of real-world problems.

The global trends in Social Studies education reflect an increasing emphasis on preparing students to engage with complex, interconnected global issues. By incorporating topics such as globalisation, climate change, and active citizenship into curricula, educational systems are equipping students with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate the challenges of the 21st century. Furthermore, the shift towards analytical, inquiry-based learning is fostering critical thinking and problem-solving abilities that are essential for students to engage meaningfully with social issues and contribute to societal development. As these trends continue to shape Social Studies education worldwide, there is potential for a more engaged, informed, and active global citizenry.

2.5.3 Comparative Analysis of Social Studies Programmes

Across all these educational systems, several best practices have emerged for successfully incorporating real-world issues and problem-solving skills into Social Studies curricula. One key practice is the use of inquiry-based learning, where students actively explore questions, investigate problems, and draw conclusions based on evidence. This method not only enhances critical thinking but also makes learning more engaging by connecting academic content to real-life issues.

Another best practice is the integration of current events and case studies into the curriculum. By analysing contemporary social, political, and economic challenges, students can see the relevance of their studies and develop the skills needed to address these challenges. For example, examining topics like climate change, migration, or global inequality helps students understand the global interconnections that shape their world. This approach encourages students to think critically about these issues and empowers them to become active participants in the solution.

Furthermore, collaborative learning is a key component of many successful Social Studies programmes. By working together to analyse issues, conduct research, and present solutions, students develop essential teamwork and communication skills. Collaborative projects also provide opportunities for students to engage with diverse perspectives, fostering a deeper understanding of complex social issues.

A comparative analysis of Social Studies curricula across different countries reveals a significant shift from rote memorisation to more engaging, skills-based learning. The incorporation of real-world issues, critical thinking, and problem-solving into Social Studies education has proven to be an effective strategy for enhancing student interest and engagement. Best practices, such as inquiry-based learning, case studies, and collaborative projects, offer valuable insights for improving Social Studies programmes. By adopting these approaches, educational systems can better prepare students to navigate the complex social, political, and economic issues of the 21st century.

2.6 The Ghanaian/National Social Studies Curriculum Context

The Ghanaian Social Studies curriculum, as outlined in recent reforms, aims to move beyond rote memorisation by fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and civic engagement among students, aligning with global trends while addressing local socio-political and economic realities.

2.6.1 Curriculum Reforms in Ghana

Ghana's Social Studies curriculum has undergone significant reforms over the past few decades, marking a critical shift from a focus on rote memorisation to a more dynamic, skills-based, and analytical approach. These reforms aim to align the curriculum with global trends while addressing the evolving pedagogical needs of students in the 21st century. The primary objective of these reforms is to equip students with the critical thinking, civic engagement, and practical knowledge required to navigate and address contemporary social, political, and economic challenges.

Shift from Memorisation to Skills-Based Learning

Historically, Social Studies education in Ghana emphasised the memorisation of facts, dates, and figures, with students often expected to recall information for exams without deep engagement with the material. This approach was largely influenced by traditional teaching methods that focused on content delivery rather than student-centered learning (Dwomoh, 2019; Jibililu, 2024; Zengulaaru, 2022). However, in recent years, there has been a significant move towards incorporating more analytical and skills-based learning strategies into the curriculum.

The current Social Studies curriculum emphasises inquiry-based learning, problem-solving, and critical thinking, with the aim of fostering students' ability to analyse

social issues, evaluate different perspectives, and draw informed conclusions. This shift is intended to develop students' cognitive and analytical skills, which are essential for their academic success and active participation in society. For example, students are encouraged to explore complex issues such as democracy, human rights, environmental sustainability, and globalisation through critical discussions, case studies, and projects (Thomas, 2009).

This change also responds to a growing demand for curricula that equip students with practical skills, such as the ability to analyse data, solve problems, and apply knowledge in real-world contexts. By moving away from rote memorisation, the curriculum now emphasises understanding and application, preparing students for the complexities of modern life.

Alignment with Global Trends

Ghana's curriculum reforms align with broader global trends in education, which prioritise the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and active citizenship. Globally, Social Studies education has moved toward teaching students how to engage with real-world issues through analytical thinking rather than focusing solely on the memorisation of historical events or geographic facts. For example, the United States, the United Kingdom, and other countries have also reformed their Social Studies programmes to emphasise inquiry-based learning, global awareness, and civic responsibility (Alazmi, 2022; NCSS, 2018; Tichnor-Wagner et al., 2017).

The Ghanaian curriculum reform incorporates these global shifts by focusing on fostering students' ability to understand complex global issues and engage in informed discussions about them. Topics such as climate change, human rights, social justice, and governance are integrated into the curriculum to ensure that students are

prepared to become informed citizens who can actively participate in their communities and the global society.

Promoting Critical Thinking and Civic Engagement

One of the key objectives of the current Social Studies curriculum in Ghana is to promote critical thinking and civic engagement. The curriculum encourages students to move beyond the memorisation of facts and develop a deeper understanding of the world around them. This includes teaching students how to critically evaluate social, political, and economic issues, recognise biases, and form independent judgments. By engaging students in these higher-order thinking processes, the curriculum aims to cultivate a generation of young people who can make informed decisions and contributing to the democratic process (Larbi, 2017).

Furthermore, the focus on civic engagement reflects the importance of preparing students to become active and responsible citizens. The curriculum emphasises the development of values such as tolerance, respect for diversity, and a commitment to social justice, which are essential for fostering a cohesive and democratic society. Students are encouraged to participate in community-based projects, engage in discussions about societal issues, and develop a sense of social responsibility.

These reforms also include a greater focus on practical knowledge, with an emphasis on applying the concepts learned in Social Studies to solve real-world problems. For instance, students may engage in projects related to environmental sustainability, community development, or governance, which allow them to connect classroom learning with the issues they encounter in their daily lives.

The curriculum reforms in Ghana represent a significant shift from a traditional, content-heavy approach to a more dynamic, skills-based model of Social Studies education. These reforms align with global trends that prioritise the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and active citizenship. By focusing on inquiry-based learning, promoting civic engagement, and equipping students with practical skills, the new curriculum aims to prepare students to navigate the complexities of the modern world and contribute meaningfully to society. However, for these reforms to be fully effective, they must be accompanied by continuous teacher training, adequate resources, and effective pedagogical strategies to ensure that students are engaged and motivated to learn.

2.6.2 Challenges in Curriculum Implementation

The successful implementation of Ghana's reformed Social Studies curriculum has faced several challenges, particularly concerning the adaptation of teachers to new pedagogical approaches. Despite the curriculum's focus on skills-based learning, critical thinking, and student engagement, teachers often encounter significant barriers that hinder the effective delivery of the curriculum. These challenges include a lack of resources, insufficient teacher training, and resistance to change, which contribute to a noticeable gap between the curriculum's intended goals and the actual practices observed in the classroom.

Lack of Resources

A key challenge in the implementation of the Social Studies curriculum is the inadequate availability of teaching resources. Teachers often struggle to find appropriate textbooks, multimedia materials, and other educational resources that align with the new curriculum's emphasis on inquiry-based and analytical learning.

The lack of resources makes it difficult for educators to implement engaging teaching methods, such as project-based learning or the use of case studies, which are essential components of the reformed curriculum. In many schools, especially those in rural or under-resourced areas like parts of the New Juaben North Municipality, the reliance on outdated textbooks or a lack of relevant materials exacerbates the challenge of providing students with a comprehensive and up-to-date education (Adjei, 2025).

This shortage of resources also limits students' access to the technology and tools necessary to fully engage with the curriculum. As the world becomes increasingly digital, the ability to incorporate technology into teaching is crucial for fostering the critical thinking and problem-solving skills that the new curriculum seeks to promote. Without sufficient access to computers, internet resources, and other educational technologies, teachers are unable to fully integrate these tools into their instruction, ultimately limiting students' opportunities for deeper engagement with Social Studies topics (Ghana Education Service, 2020).

Insufficient Training and Professional Development

Another significant challenge in implementing the reformed Social Studies curriculum is the lack of adequate teacher training and professional development. While the new curriculum requires teachers to adopt student-centered, inquiry-based pedagogical strategies, many teachers still rely on traditional, teacher-centered approaches due to insufficient training in modern educational techniques. Although some professional development programmes have been implemented by the Ghana Education Service (GES), the quality and consistency of these programmes are often questioned. Many teachers report feeling ill-equipped to teach the new curriculum effectively because they have not received the necessary training in facilitating

inquiry-based learning, promoting critical thinking, or using innovative teaching tools (Osei, 2017).

Furthermore, the existing professional development programmes are often limited in scope and frequency, leaving many teachers without continuous support as they attempt to adapt to the new curriculum. The absence of ongoing training opportunities means that teachers may not stay abreast of best practices or emerging educational technologies, which further exacerbates the gap between curriculum expectations and classroom practices (Thacker, 2017).

Resistance to Change

Resistance to change is another significant barrier to successful curriculum implementation. Many teachers, particularly those with long-standing teaching experience, are accustomed to traditional methods of instruction that emphasise memorisation and direct transmission of knowledge. Shifting to a more interactive and student-centered approach requires a significant change in mindset and teaching philosophy, which is often met with reluctance (Ghana Education Service, 2020). Teachers may feel that the new curriculum demands more from them in terms of planning, time, and effort, making them hesitant to embrace these changes fully.

Additionally, teachers who are not fully convinced of the benefits of inquiry-based learning or critical thinking may be more inclined to fall back on traditional methods, resulting in a disconnect between the curriculum's goals and actual classroom practices. This resistance to change is further compounded by the pressures of large class sizes, limited time for lesson preparation, and administrative expectations that prioritise examination results over the development of critical thinking skills (Adu-Gyamfi & Anderson, 2021).

The Gap Between Curriculum Goals and Classroom Practices

The challenges outlined above contribute to a significant gap between the goals of the Social Studies curriculum and the reality of classroom practices. While the curriculum emphasises developing students' ability to analyse social issues, think critically, and engage in problem-solving, teachers often revert to familiar teaching methods that prioritise memorisation and rote learning. This disconnect between curriculum goals and classroom practices is reflected in students' lack of engagement with the subject matter and their limited development of the skills the curriculum is intended to foster.

For example, although the curriculum advocates the use of inquiry-based learning to foster critical thinking, many teachers continue to rely heavily on lecture-based methods and traditional assessments that focus on rote memorisation of facts. This misalignment hinders the full realisation of the curriculum's intended outcomes, as students are not provided with the opportunities to engage deeply with the subject matter and develop the practical skills required for active citizenship (Van Dyke, 2013).

While the reforms to the Social Studies curriculum in Ghana are aimed at improving the quality of education and fostering skills like critical thinking and civic engagement, several challenges remain in their implementation. The lack of resources, insufficient teacher training, and resistance to change are significant barriers that prevent teachers from fully adopting the new pedagogical approaches. These challenges contribute to a gap between the intended goals of the curriculum and the realities of classroom practice, ultimately hindering students' engagement and the development of the skills that are essential for active participation in society. Addressing these issues will require targeted efforts to improve teacher training,

provide necessary resources, and foster a greater culture of innovation and openness to change within the education system.

2.6.3 The Role of Social Studies in National Development

Social Studies plays a pivotal role in Ghana's educational framework, contributing significantly to the country's broader national development goals. As part of the curriculum at the Junior High School (JHS) level, Social Studies seeks to foster active citizenship, promote national unity, and prepare students for the workforce. These goals are central to Ghana's development agenda, which emphasises building a well-informed and responsible citizenry capable of contributing to the country's social, economic, and political growth. However, despite these aspirations, the current lack of student interest in Social Studies poses significant challenges to achieving these objectives.

Fostering Active Citizenship

One of the primary roles of Social Studies education in Ghana is to foster active citizenship by equipping students with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to participate meaningfully in the democratic process. The curriculum is designed to teach students about their rights and responsibilities as citizens, the functioning of democratic institutions, and the importance of social justice and human rights. These concepts are vital for nurturing a generation of young people who are not only aware of their civic duties but are also motivated to contribute to the betterment of society (Kankam, 2016).

In particular, Social Studies encourages students to engage in national issues such as governance, poverty alleviation, environmental sustainability, and national development policies. By understanding these issues and participating in discussions,

students become informed citizens who can influence decisions that impact their communities and the nation at large (Ghana Education Service, 2020). Furthermore, Social Studies offers a platform for addressing social challenges such as inequality, unemployment, and corruption by teaching students to think critically about social issues and to seek solutions that promote equity and justice.

Promoting National Unity

Social Studies also plays a crucial role in promoting national unity by teaching students about the diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious groups that make up Ghana's population. The curriculum emphasises the importance of social cohesion, tolerance, and respect for diversity, all of which are fundamental to maintaining peace and harmony in a multi-ethnic society. The study of Ghana's history, geography, and economic systems helps students to appreciate their shared identity as Ghanaians, despite the country's regional and ethnic differences (Oppong, 2019).

By fostering understanding and respect for diversity, Social Studies helps to counteract the potential for ethnic conflicts and social division. Students learn to appreciate the value of unity in diversity, which is essential for national development. Moreover, Social Studies equips students with the knowledge of Ghana's historical struggles for independence and the contributions of key figures to the country's development, reinforcing a collective sense of pride and national identity (Ghana Education Service, 2020).

Preparing Students for the Workforce

Another key function of Social Studies is preparing students for the workforce by developing the skills necessary for economic participation. Through the curriculum, students are introduced to various aspects of Ghana's economy, including agriculture,

industry, and services. They learn about entrepreneurship, economic development, and the importance of sustainable economic practices. These lessons are designed to inspire students to pursue careers in fields such as business, governance, or community development (Adams, 2022).

In addition, Social Studies helps to develop transferable skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and teamwork, which are essential for the modern workforce. As the country continues to develop, the ability to adapt to changing job markets and contribute to economic progress is vital for national growth. By encouraging students to think critically about social and economic issues, the curriculum helps to prepare them for the demands of the workforce (Buabeng & Amo-Darko, 2025).

Challenges in Achieving National Development Goals

While the role of Social Studies in fostering active citizenship, promoting national unity, and preparing students for the workforce is undeniable, achieving these objectives is complicated by the current lack of student interest in the subject. The disengagement of students with Social Studies poses a significant barrier to the realisation of these goals. As the curriculum continues to evolve toward more analytical and skills-based learning, it becomes increasingly important for students to be actively engaged in the subject matter. However, when students view Social Studies as irrelevant or boring, they miss out on the opportunity to develop the critical thinking and citizenship skills that the curriculum aims to impart (Zevin, 2015).

This lack of interest is compounded by issues such as ineffective teaching methods, limited resources, and the persistence of traditional rote memorisation approaches that fail to stimulate curiosity or active engagement. The result is that students may

struggle to connect the content of Social Studies to their daily lives and the broader goals of national development. Addressing this lack of engagement is crucial for ensuring that the curriculum can fulfill its intended role in shaping active, informed, and responsible citizens who are prepared to contribute to the social and economic development of Ghana.

The Social Studies curriculum in Ghana plays a critical role in fostering active citizenship, promoting national unity, and preparing students for the workforce, all of which are essential for the country's continued development. However, the current lack of student interest in the subject presents a significant challenge to achieving these objectives. To ensure that Social Studies fulfills its potential as a tool for national development, it is essential to adopt more engaging and student-centered pedagogical approaches, provide adequate resources, and align the curriculum with the real-world interests and needs of students. By addressing these challenges, Ghana can harness the full potential of Social Studies education in shaping the next generation of leaders and citizens.

2.7 Empirical Review

2.7.1 Topics in the JHS Social Studies Curriculum that Generate High Interest

Among Students

Empirical studies examining students' interest in Social Studies at the Junior High School (JHS) level consistently acknowledge that learner engagement is not evenly distributed across curriculum topics. However, the strength of evidence and the conclusions drawn vary depending on research design, sample characteristics, and

methodological rigor. A critical review of these studies revealed both converging findings and notable limitations that warrant careful interpretation.

Several Ghanaian studies, particularly those employing mixed-methods and survey-based designs, identify civic education, democracy, and governance as topics that generate relatively high student interest. Frimpong (2020), using questionnaires complemented by classroom observations, found that students expressed strong interest in topics such as human rights, democratic participation, and civic responsibilities. The methodological strength of this study lies in its triangulation of data sources, which enhances the credibility of its findings. However, the study's focus on urban schools in Greater Accra limits the generalisability of its conclusions to other contexts, such as semi-urban municipalities like New Juaben North. Nonetheless, its findings align with Osman and Mensah's (2020) survey-based study, which reported that lessons on national history, particularly Ghana's independence struggle and the contributions of key national figures stimulated learners' sense of national pride and identity. While Osman and Mensah's study relied primarily on self-reported student perceptions, which may be subject to social desirability bias, the convergence of findings across both studies strengthens the claim that civics-related topics are inherently engaging when well contextualised.

Studies focusing on environmental issues and sustainable development also report high levels of student interest, though their methodological approaches differ. Eshun (2020), through curriculum analysis and teacher interviews, argued that students are more engaged when environmental topics are linked to local community challenges such as sanitation, deforestation, and flooding. Although this study did not directly measure student interest using quantitative instruments, its qualitative insights provide

explanatory depth by illustrating *why* such topics resonate with learners. The lack of direct student data, however, limits the ability to quantify the magnitude of interest, suggesting the need for complementary student-focused studies.

Research on economic issues, including poverty, employment, and development, presents more nuanced findings. Yaw et al. (2022), using a descriptive survey design, found that these topics generate interest only when teachers employ real-life examples and problem-based learning strategies. This conditional finding highlights an important methodological distinction: interest is not solely topic-driven but mediated by pedagogy. Unlike Frimpong (2020), who treated interest as an outcome variable, Yaw et al. (2022) implicitly positions instructional approach as a moderating factor, thereby offering a more layered interpretation of student engagement.

Overall, while empirical studies consistently identify civics, national history, environmental issues, and selected economic topics as interest-generating, methodological differences influence the strength and scope of conclusions. Studies that triangulate data and account for pedagogical context provide more robust insights than those relying solely on perception surveys. Collectively, the literature suggests that topic relevance alone is insufficient; how content is taught significantly determines whether student interest is sustained. This underscores the need for context-sensitive and methodologically rigorous investigations, particularly within specific localities such as the New Juaben North Municipality.

2.7.2 Topics in the JHS Social Studies Curriculum that Pose Teaching

Challenges to Teachers

Empirical literature on the teaching of Social Studies at the Junior High School (JHS) level in Ghana consistently reports that certain curriculum topics pose significant

instructional challenges to teachers, despite policy-driven shifts toward analytical and skills-based learning. However, the extent and nature of these challenges vary across studies, largely due to differences in research design, data sources, and analytical depth. A critical comparison of these studies reveals both converging evidence and methodological limitations that shape current understanding of the problem.

Across multiple studies, economic concepts emerge as one of the most problematic areas for Social Studies teachers. Frimpong (2020), using a mixed-methods approach involving teacher questionnaires and interviews, reported that topics such as economic systems, globalisation, and poverty alleviation are perceived as abstract and difficult to simplify for JHS learners. The methodological strength of this study lies in its inclusion of teachers' reflective accounts, which provide insight into instructional decision-making. However, the study relied heavily on self-reported data and did not include classroom observations, limiting the ability to verify whether reported difficulties translated into observable teaching practices. Nonetheless, similar findings have been reported in other survey-based studies, suggesting a consistent pattern rather than isolated perceptions.

Challenges associated with environmental issues, particularly climate change and sustainable development, are also widely documented, though studies differ in how they conceptualise the problem. Eshun (2020), through curriculum analysis and teacher interviews, argued that the challenge lies not in content relevance but in teachers' limited access to current data, instructional materials, and continuous professional development. While this qualitative approach provides depth in explaining structural constraints, it does not quantify the prevalence of these challenges across schools. In contrast, Yaw et al. (2022), employing a descriptive

survey design, reported that most teachers experienced difficulty teaching environmental topics due to inadequate teaching and learning resources. The convergence of findings across both qualitative and quantitative approaches strengthens the conclusion that resource constraints are a central factor affecting the teaching of environmental topics.

Studies examining civics and governance-related topics present more nuanced findings. Osman and Mensah (2020), using a case study design, found that teachers often avoid in-depth discussions of democratic processes, human rights, and governance due to concerns about political sensitivity and maintaining classroom neutrality. While the case study design allowed for contextual richness, its limited sample size restricts generalisation. However, similar concerns have been echoed in broader studies, suggesting that the challenge is systemic rather than context-specific. Importantly, these studies point to teacher confidence and professional preparedness, rather than content difficulty alone, as the primary barrier.

Overall, the empirical literature indicates that teaching challenges in Social Studies are not solely content-driven but are mediated by teacher preparation, resource availability, and contextual constraints. Methodologically, studies that triangulate data sources or combine qualitative and quantitative methods offer more robust explanations than those relying on single-source perceptions. Collectively, the evidence suggests that without sustained professional development and instructional support, teachers are likely to struggle with complex and sensitive topics, thereby limiting the curriculum's capacity to achieve its intended outcomes of critical thinking and active citizenship.

2.7.3 Topics in the JHS Social Studies Curriculum that Present Learning

Difficulties to Students

Empirical studies examining students' learning difficulties in Junior High School (JHS) Social Studies in Ghana reveal a consistent pattern: students tend to struggle with topics that are abstract, conceptually demanding, or weakly connected to their lived experiences. However, the robustness of these findings varies depending on the methodological approaches adopted by researchers, including differences in sample size, data sources, and analytical depth. A comparative examination of these studies provides clearer insight into both the nature of students' difficulties and the quality of evidence supporting these claims.

Across the literature, economic concepts are most frequently identified as challenging for students. Yaw et al. (2022), using a large-scale descriptive survey of JHS students, found that topics such as economic systems, globalisation, and poverty alleviation ranked among the least understood. The strength of this study lies in its broad sample, which enhances generalisability. However, its reliance on self-reported student perceptions limits the ability to determine whether the difficulties stem from conceptual complexity, teaching methods, or assessment practices. Complementing this, Eshun (2020) employed a qualitative approach involving classroom observations and student interviews, revealing that students' difficulties arise largely from the absence of contextualised examples and real-life applications. The convergence of findings across both quantitative and qualitative studies strengthens the conclusion that abstraction and lack of contextualisation are central to students' struggles with economic topics.

Studies focusing on environmental issues similarly report significant learning difficulties, though they emphasise different explanatory factors. Frimpong (2020), through a mixed-methods design, found that students struggled to link global issues such as climate change and sustainable development to their immediate environments. While the mixed-method approach enhances credibility through data triangulation, the study did not explicitly control for teacher competence or resource availability, which may mediate students' learning experiences. Nevertheless, comparable findings across multiple studies suggest that the interdisciplinary and scientific nature of environmental topics increases cognitive demand for JHS learners, particularly when instructional resources are inadequate.

With regard to civic education, Osman and Mensah (2020) adopted a case study approach to explore students' understanding of democracy, governance, and human rights. The study revealed that students found these topics conceptually difficult due to their abstract nature and limited opportunities for discussion and application. Although the narrow scope of the case study restricts generalisation, its findings align with broader survey-based studies that identify civic concepts as challenging due to weak instructional scaffolding and limited engagement with real-life civic experiences.

Overall, empirical literature demonstrates convergence across studies that economic, environmental, and civic topics present the greatest learning difficulties for JHS students. Methodologically, studies that integrate student perceptions with observational or qualitative data offer more compelling explanations than those relying solely on surveys. Collectively, the evidence suggests that students' learning challenges are less about the irrelevance of Social Studies content and more about the

cognitive demands of the topics and the lack of contextualised, learner-centered instructional approaches.

2.7.4 Factors Contributing to Students' Challenges in Learning Social Studies at the JHS Level

Empirical studies on students' challenges in learning Social Studies at the Junior High School (JHS) level in Ghana consistently point to a combination of pedagogical, teacher-related, and structural factors. However, the strength of evidence supporting these claims varies across studies due to differences in methodological design, sample scope, and analytical rigour. A critical comparison of these studies provides a more nuanced understanding of the factors that hinder effective learning in Social Studies.

One of the most frequently cited challenges is the continued reliance on teacher-centered instructional methods. Akowuah et al. (2025), using a large-scale quantitative survey of Social Studies teachers across multiple districts, reported a dominant use of lecture-based and rote-learning approaches despite curriculum reforms advocating learner-centered pedagogy. The breadth of their sample enhances the external validity of their findings, yet the study relies heavily on self-reported teacher practices, which may understate the extent of pedagogical limitations. In contrast, Frimpong (2020) employed a mixed-methods approach combining classroom observations with student interviews, offering stronger empirical support by demonstrating how passive teaching practices directly limit student participation, inquiry, and motivation. The convergence of findings across these methodological approaches strengthens the conclusion that pedagogy remains a central barrier to effective learning.

Teacher competence and professional preparation also emerge as critical factors. Yaw et al. (2022), through a descriptive survey of both teachers and students, found that inadequate subject-matter knowledge and limited exposure to contemporary teaching strategies constrained teachers' ability to simplify complex concepts. While the study benefits from incorporating multiple perspectives, it lacks longitudinal data to assess whether professional development initiatives lead to sustained pedagogical improvement. Osman and Mensah (2020), using a qualitative case study design, provided deeper insight into how teachers' low instructional confidence affects classroom dynamics, particularly in teaching abstract topics such as governance and democracy. Although the case study's limited scope restricts generalisability, its findings corroborate broader survey-based evidence that teacher self-efficacy and training quality significantly shape students' learning experiences.

Resource availability is another consistently identified challenge, though studies differ in how rigorously this factor is examined. Mensah et al. (2023), employing a school-based comparative study, demonstrated that schools with access to multimedia and instructional resources reported higher student engagement levels than resource-constrained schools. The comparative nature of this study strengthens causal inference; however, it does not fully account for teacher competence as a mediating variable. Nonetheless, when compared with Frimpong's (2020) findings, which also highlight inadequate teaching and learning materials, a clear pattern emerges linking resource scarcity to students' learning difficulties.

Finally, the socio-cultural relevance of curriculum content has been identified as a moderating factor in student engagement. Frimpong (2020) noted that students struggled when Social Studies content was not contextualised to local realities. While

this conclusion is based primarily on student perception data, its consistency with observational evidence from other studies lends it credibility.

The empirical literature suggests that students' challenges in learning Social Studies at the JHS level are multifaceted and interrelated. Studies employing mixed or comparative methods provide more robust explanations than those relying solely on perception-based surveys. Collectively, the evidence indicates that outdated pedagogical practices, limited teacher preparation, inadequate resources, and weak contextualisation of content jointly contribute to students' learning difficulties, underscoring the need for integrated interventions rather than isolated reforms.

2.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter explored the key aspects of the Social Studies curriculum, particularly its role in shaping students' interests and engagement with the subject. It began by examining the conceptual framework surrounding Social Studies education, with a focus on the factors influencing student interest in Junior High Schools (JHS) within the New Juaben North Municipality. The review highlighted how various elements such as curriculum design, teaching methodologies, and real-world relevance contribute to the level of student engagement. The shift from rote memorisation towards a more analytical, skills-based curriculum was also discussed, emphasising the need for students to develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and civic engagement skills. The chapter also addressed the influence of global trends, including the integration of globalisation, climate change, and citizenship into Social Studies programmes, further underscoring the subject's contemporary relevance.

In addition to the theoretical perspectives, this chapter critically examined the practical challenges in implementing the reformed Social Studies curriculum in

Ghana. The lack of resources, insufficient teacher training, and resistance to change were identified as key barriers to the successful implementation of inquiry-based, student-centered learning methods. The gap between the curriculum's goals and the actual classroom practices observed was also addressed, revealing that despite the reforms, traditional teaching methods still dominate many Social Studies classrooms. Finally, the chapter discussed how the Social Studies curriculum contributes to national development by fostering active citizenship, promoting national unity, and preparing students for the workforce. It concluded by highlighting the need for further efforts to improve teacher preparation, classroom resources, and pedagogical approaches to fully realise the potential of Social Studies education in Ghana.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology adopted for the study, outlining the systematic procedures employed to investigate students' interest in the study of Social Studies in Junior High Schools within the New Juaben North Municipality. It describes the research paradigm, approach, and design guiding the study, as well as the population, sample and sampling techniques used. The chapter further explains the data collection instruments, procedures for data collection, methods of data analysis, and the ethical considerations observed to ensure the credibility, validity, and reliability of the findings.

3.2 Research Paradigm

This study was anchored in the positivist research paradigm, which assumes that social phenomena can be objectively observed, measured, and analysed using systematic procedures (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Ryan, 2018). The paradigm was appropriate because the study sought to examine students' levels of interest in Social Studies, identify challenging curriculum topics, and analyse influencing factors through empirical data gathered from JHS students and teachers. Positivism supports the use of structured instruments and quantitative analysis to establish patterns, relationships, and trends that are measurable and verifiable (Park et al., 2020). By adopting this paradigm, the study aimed to generate reliable and generalisable findings that can inform curriculum implementation and pedagogical practices within the New Juaben North Municipality.

3.3 Research Approach

Consistent with the positivist paradigm underpinning this study, a quantitative research approach was adopted to systematically examine students' interests in Social Studies and the challenges associated with teaching and learning the subject at the JHS level. The quantitative approach is appropriate because it facilitates the collection of numerical data that can be objectively analysed to identify patterns, trends, and relationships among variables such as student interest, curriculum topics, and instructional challenges (Bryman, 2016; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). Through the use of structured instruments, particularly questionnaires, the approach enhances reliability, objectivity, and replicability of findings, thereby supporting evidence-based conclusions relevant to curriculum implementation in the New Juaben North Municipality (Mohajan, 2020).

3.4 Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional research design, which involves collecting data from a defined population at a single point in time to describe existing conditions and relationships among variables (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). This design is appropriate for examining students' interests in Social Studies, identifying challenging curriculum topics, and exploring associated teaching and learning difficulties within Junior High Schools in the New Juaben North Municipality. A cross-sectional design enables the identification of prevailing patterns, trends, and variations in students' perceptions and experiences without manipulating the study environment (Levin, 2006; Shields & Rangarajan, 2013). Consequently, the design supports objective measurement and provides generalisable findings that reflect the current state of Social Studies education in the municipality.

3.5 Population

The population for this study comprised Junior High School (JHS) students and Social Studies teachers in public and private schools within the New Juaben North Municipality. This population was considered appropriate because both groups are central stakeholders in the teaching and learning of Social Studies and are directly affected by curriculum implementation and pedagogical practices. At the time of the study, the municipality had an estimated 32 public and 11 private JHSs, with approximately 3,483 students and 724 teachers of which 156 were Social Studies teachers, forming the target population.

JHS students were included because they provide first-hand information on their level of interest in Social Studies, the topics they find engaging or difficult, and the challenges they encounter while learning. Such learner-based perspectives are essential for understanding how curriculum intentions translate into classroom experiences (Levstik & Barton, 2022). Social Studies teachers were also included because they possess professional and instructional insights regarding curriculum delivery, teaching strategies, assessment practices, and resource availability. Teachers' perspectives are particularly important for identifying instructional challenges and pedagogical gaps that may influence student interest and engagement (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

The inclusion of both students and teachers therefore enabled a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing students' interest in Social Studies within the municipality.

3.6 Sample and Sampling Technique

The study employed a scientifically determined sample to ensure that the findings accurately reflected the characteristics of the target population of Junior High School students and Social Studies teachers within the New Juaben North Municipality. To determine an appropriate sample size, Yamane's (1973) sample size determination formula was used. This formula is widely applied in educational and social science research where the population is known and a manageable level of precision is required. The formula is expressed as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

where n represents the sample size, N denotes the population size, and e is the margin of error, set at 5% (0.05) for this study.

For teachers:

$$n = \frac{156}{1 + 156*(0.05)^2} = 112.23 \approx 112$$

For students:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{3483}{1 + 3483*(0.05)^2} = 358.79 \approx 359$$

Based on this formula, a sample of 112 Social Studies teachers and 359 JHS students was derived from the total population of teachers and students in the municipality.

The adequacy of this sample size is supported by the Central Limit Theorem, which suggests that samples of 30 or more are sufficient to approximate a normal distribution for statistical analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Additionally, Saunders et al. (2019) argue that sampling approximately 10% of a population exceeding 100 respondents enhances the reliability and generalisability of quantitative findings, particularly in survey-based educational studies. The selected sample

therefore provided sufficient statistical power to analyse students' interests, learning challenges, and instructional issues associated with Social Studies.

In terms of sampling techniques, the study adopted a combination of purposive and convenience sampling methods. Purposive sampling was used to select Social Studies teachers because of their specialised role and direct involvement in curriculum delivery. This ensured that respondents possessed relevant professional knowledge and experience necessary to provide meaningful data related to teaching challenges and pedagogical practices (Palinkas et al., 2015). The technique was particularly suitable for capturing informed perspectives on curriculum implementation and student engagement.

Convenience sampling was used to select JHS students who were readily accessible and willing to participate in the study. This method was appropriate given the school-based nature of the research and the need to gather data efficiently within limited time and logistical constraints (Etikan & Bala, 2017). When combined with purposive sampling, convenience sampling enhanced feasibility while still maintaining relevance to the study objectives (Bryman, 2016).

Overall, the sampling procedures adopted ensured methodological rigour, feasibility, and relevance, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the study's findings on students' interests in Social Studies within the New Juaben North Municipality.

3.7 Instrumentation

This study employed structured questionnaires as the primary data collection instruments to gather quantitative data on students' interest in Social Studies, curriculum topics that generate interest or difficulty, and factors contributing to learning challenges at the Junior High School (JHS) level in the New Juabeng North Municipality. Primary data were considered appropriate because they provide first-

hand, current, and context-specific information directly related to the research objectives (Saunders et al., 2019). The use of questionnaires enables the systematic collection of standardized data from a relatively large sample of students and teachers, thereby enhancing objectivity, comparability, and statistical analysis (Bryman, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Two separate but complementary questionnaires were developed: one for students and another for Social Studies teachers. Both instruments were carefully structured to reflect the strands and core themes of the Ghana Education Service (GES) JHS Social Studies Curriculum, including citizenship, governance, environmental sustainability, national identity, and socio-economic development. This ensured content relevance and construct validity of the instruments (DeVellis & Thorpe, 2021).

The students' questionnaire comprised five main sections. Section A captured respondents' demographic characteristics, including gender, age range, and class level (JHS 1–3), which were necessary for contextualising variations in interest and learning experiences. Section B measured students' general interest in Social Studies using six items rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Not Interested" to "Extremely Interested." These items assessed students' interest in the subject, curriculum content, textbooks, teaching and learning resources, instructional methods, and assessment practices. This section directly addressed the first research objective on students' overall interest in Social Studies.

Section C focused on curriculum topics that generate student interest, reflecting key themes such as environmental issues, citizenship and human rights, democracy, peace and security, population studies, science and technology, tourism, and Ghana's independence. Students rated their level of interest in sixteen curriculum topics using

a five-point Likert scale. Section D examined curriculum topics students find challenging, using the same topic list and a five-point scale ranging from “Not Challenging” to “Extremely Challenging,” thereby allowing for direct comparison between interest and difficulty across topics. Section E explored factors contributing to learning challenges, including abstract concepts, inadequate materials, teaching methods, limited instructional time, language barriers, low relevance, and limited ICT integration, measured using dichotomous (Yes/No) responses for clarity and ease of understanding among students.

The teachers’ questionnaire also consisted of multiple sections aligned with the study’s objectives. Section A collected demographic and professional data, including teaching experience and qualifications, which are known to influence instructional practices and perceptions of student learning. Section B examined teachers’ perceptions of students’ interest in Social Studies, using a five-point Likert scale to assess engagement, motivation, and responsiveness during lessons and assessments. Section C focused on curriculum topics that generate high student interest, while Section D addressed topics that pose teaching challenges to teachers. Section E examined topics that present learning difficulties to students from the teachers’ perspective, and Section F assessed factors contributing to students’ learning challenges, such as abstract content, inadequate resources, limited ICT use, and insufficient instructional time.

Prior to the main data collection, the questionnaires were pre-tested using a small, representative sample of students and teachers outside the selected schools. Pretesting helped identify ambiguous wording, improve clarity, and enhance the reliability of the instruments (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Han, Park, & Lee, 2021). Feedback from the

pilot study informed minor revisions, thereby strengthening the instruments' validity and internal consistency.

For administration, a mixed-mode approach was adopted. Teachers completed the questionnaires electronically via Google Forms to enhance efficiency and data accuracy, while students completed printed copies to accommodate varying levels of digital literacy and access. This approach maximised response rates and ensured inclusivity, consistent with best practices in educational research (Bryman, 2016; Saunders et al., 2019).

Overall, the structured questionnaires provided reliable, valid, and curriculum-aligned data essential for addressing the research objectives and answering the research questions effectively.

3.8 Validity and Reliability

Ensuring the validity and reliability of the research instruments was essential for enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings on students' interests in Social Studies at the Junior High School level in the New Juaben North Municipality. Validity refers to the extent to which an instrument accurately measures the constructs it is intended to assess (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, content validity was established by aligning the questionnaire items with the objectives of the study and the core themes of the Ghana Education Service (GES) JHS Social Studies curriculum. The instruments were further reviewed by the research supervisor and subject-matter experts to confirm that the items adequately represented students' interest, challenging topics, and factors influencing learning difficulties.

Construct validity was ensured by structuring questionnaire items to reflect established theoretical dimensions of student interest, curriculum relevance, and

learning challenges, consistent with measurement principles in educational research. The use of Likert-scale items allowed for systematic assessment of respondents' perceptions and attitudes across these constructs (DeVellis, 2017).

Reliability concerns the consistency and stability of measurement over time (Saunders et al., 2019). Internal consistency reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with coefficients of 0.70 or above considered acceptable for educational research (Taber, 2018). Additionally, a pilot test was conducted prior to the main study to identify ambiguities and improve clarity, thereby enhancing the stability of responses (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). These procedures collectively ensured that the instruments generated dependable and accurate data suitable for meaningful analysis and interpretation.

Table 1 presents the reliability statistics for the two instruments used for the study.

Table 1 Reliability Statistics

Questionnaire	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
Students	.855	46
Teachers	.715	34

3.9 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process for this study was carried out systematically to ensure accuracy, ethical compliance, and the collection of high-quality data relevant to students' interests in Social Studies within Junior High Schools in the New Juaben North Municipality. Prior to data collection, official permission was sought from the Municipal Education Directorate and the heads of the selected schools. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity, and

confidentiality, were clearly explained to all respondents in line with established educational research standards (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The primary data were collected using structured questionnaires administered to both students and Social Studies teachers. Before the main administration, the instruments were pre-tested in a school outside the study area to identify ambiguities and improve clarity. Necessary revisions were made based on feedback from the pilot test to enhance reliability and validity (Bryman, 2016). The final questionnaires were then administered during normal school hours to minimise disruption to instructional activities.

For teachers, questionnaires were distributed primarily through Google Forms to facilitate timely responses and efficient data management. Printed copies were also provided where necessary to accommodate varying levels of access to digital tools. Students, on the other hand, completed printed questionnaires under the supervision of the researcher and trained assistants to ensure proper understanding of the items and independent responses. Completed questionnaires were collected immediately to reduce non-response and data loss. This blended approach enhanced response rates and ensured the collection of comprehensive and reliable data for analysis.

3.10 Data Analysis Procedure

The data analysis procedure for this study was designed to systematically address the research objectives and ensure that valid, reliable, and meaningful conclusions were drawn from the data collected from students and teachers in the New Juaben North Municipality. Consistent with the positivist paradigm and quantitative research approach adopted for the study, both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were employed to analyse the questionnaire data. All analysis were conducted using

SPSS version 26, which is widely recognised for its efficiency and accuracy in handling survey-based educational data.

Initially, descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were used to analyse respondents' demographic characteristics, including gender, age, class level, and professional qualifications. This step provided a clear profile of the study participants and ensured an adequate understanding of the background variables that could influence students' interest and learning experiences in Social Studies. Frequencies and percentages were also used to summarise responses to dichotomous (Yes/No) items relating to sources of learning challenges.

To address Objective One, which sought to identify topics in the JHS Social Studies curriculum that generate high interest among students, data from Section C (Topics of Interest: TOI1–TOI16) of the students' questionnaire were analysed using mean scores and the Relative Importance Index (RII). The RII was particularly useful in ranking curriculum topics according to students' perceived level of interest, thereby allowing the researcher to determine which topics were most engaging and which attracted relatively low interest.

For Objective Two, which examined topics in the JHS Social Studies curriculum that pose teaching challenges to teachers, responses from Section D (Challenging Topics: CT1–CT15) of the teachers' questionnaire were analysed using descriptive statistics and RII. This enabled the ranking of topics based on perceived teaching difficulty.

In addressing Objective Three, which focused on identifying topics that present learning difficulties to students, data from Section D (Challenging Topics: CT1–CT15) of the students' questionnaire were similarly analysed using mean scores and RII. This approach ensured consistency in comparing student-identified learning

difficulties with teacher-identified teaching challenges across the same curriculum topics.

Finally, Objective Four, which explored factors contributing to students' challenges in learning Social Studies, was analysed using frequencies, percentages, and chi-square tests of independence. Data from Section E (Sources of Challenges: SOC1–SOC10) of both students' and teachers' questionnaires were examined to identify dominant factors influencing learning difficulties. Pearson's correlation analysis was also employed to examine the relationship between students' interest levels (IISS1–IISS6) and identified learning challenges, thereby providing deeper insight into how interest and difficulty interact in Social Studies learning.

Overall, the combination of descriptive and inferential statistical techniques ensured a comprehensive, objective, and rigorous analysis of the data, enhancing the credibility and applicability of the study's findings to curriculum development, instructional practice, and educational policy decision-making.

3.11 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were carefully observed throughout the conduct of this study to protect the rights, safety, and dignity of all participants, particularly given that the study involved Junior High School students. Prior to data collection, permission was obtained from relevant educational authorities and school heads within the New Juaben North Municipality. Informed consent was sought from all participants; students were adequately briefed on the purpose of the study, and their participation was strictly voluntary, with the right to withdraw at any stage without any negative consequences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, respondents were not required to provide names or any personally identifiable

information, and all data collected were used solely for academic purposes. The questionnaires were administered in a manner that minimised disruption to teaching and learning activities. Data was securely stored and accessible only to the researcher. These measures ensured compliance with established ethical standards of educational research, including respect, beneficence, and integrity (Bryman, 2016; Saunders et al., 2019).

3.12 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the methodological framework that guided the study. The chapter outlined the philosophical and methodological foundations of the study, which were anchored in the positivist research paradigm and supported by a quantitative research approach. A descriptive cross-sectional survey design was adopted to provide a systematic and objective assessment of students' interests, perceived challenges, and instructional issues related to the Social Studies curriculum at a specific point in time. The chapter further described the population, sample size, and sampling techniques employed in selecting respondents for the study. Junior High School students and Social Studies teachers were identified as the target population due to their direct involvement in the teaching and learning of the subject. Appropriate sampling procedures were used to ensure representativeness and relevance, thereby enhancing the credibility and generalisability of the findings. The data collection instruments, consisting of structured questionnaires for both students and teachers, were designed to align with the research objectives and the current Social Studies curriculum framework in Ghana.

In addition, the chapter detailed the procedures for data collection, validity, and reliability to ensure the accuracy, consistency, and trustworthiness of the data

gathered. Ethical considerations guiding the conduct of the study were also discussed, highlighting informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation. Finally, the chapter explained the data analysis procedures, including the use of descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to interpret the data. Overall, this chapter established a rigorous methodological foundation for addressing the research questions and provided a clear basis for the presentation and discussion of findings in the subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents, analyses, and discusses the findings of the study in relation to the research objectives, beginning with the demographic characteristics of both students and Social Studies teachers, followed by statistical analysis of students' interests, challenging topics, and factors influencing the teaching and learning of Social Studies in the New Juaben North Municipality.

4.2 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 2 and Table 3 display the demographic characteristics of the student and Social Studies teacher respondents involved in the study, respectively.

Table 2 Demographic Characteristics of Student Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	155	43.2
	Female	204	56.8
	Total	359	100.0
Age Range	Below 15	209	58.2
	15-17	147	40.9
	18 or more	3	.8
	Total	359	100.0
Class Level	JHS 1	171	47.6
	JHS 2	104	29.0
	JHS 3	84	23.4
	Total	359	100.0

In terms of gender distribution, female students constituted the majority of the sample, accounting for 56.8%, while male students represented 43.2%. Regarding age, the majority of respondents were below 15 years, representing 58.2% of the sample, followed by those aged between 15 and 17 years, who constituted 40.9%. Only a minor proportion of the students (0.8%) were aged 18 years or above. With respect to class level, nearly half of the respondents were in JHS 1 (47.6%), while 29% and 23.4% were in JHS 2 and JHS 3 respectively.

Table 3 Demographic Characteristics of Teacher Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	44	39.3
	Female	68	60.7
	Total	112	100.0
Age Range (years)	Below 30	36	32.1
	30-39	58	51.8
	40-49	18	16.1
	Total	112	100.0
Highest Professional Qualification	Diploma in Education	8	7.1
	Bachelor's Degree	100	89.3
	Master's Degree	4	3.6
	Total	112	100.0
Teaching Experience in Teaching Social Studies (years)	Below 5	36	32.1
	5-10	57	50.9
	11-15	19	17.0
	Total	112	100.0

In terms of gender, female teachers formed the majority of the sample, accounting for 60.7%, while male teachers constituted 39.3%. With respect to age, most of the

teachers were within the 30–39 years category (51.8%), followed by those below 30 years (32.1%). Teachers aged between 40 and 49 years constituted the smallest proportion (16.1%).

Regarding professional qualification, an overwhelming majority of the respondents (89.3%) possessed a Bachelor’s degree, while a small proportion held a Diploma in Education (7.1%) or a Master’s degree (3.6%). In terms of teaching experience, over half of the teachers (50.9%) had between 5 and 10 years of experience in teaching Social Studies, while 32.1% had less than 5 years. Teachers with 11–15 years of experience constituted 17%.

4.3 Analysis of Research Objectives

Table 4 Students’ Level of Interest in Topics in the JHS Social Studies Curriculum

Topic	Mean	RII	Rank
Adolescent Reproductive Health	4.25	0.851	1 st
Independent Ghana	4.12	0.824	2 nd
Socialisation and Family Life	4.08	0.816	3 rd
Understanding Our Natural World	4.06	0.813	4 th
Environmental Issues	4.05	0.810	5 th
Peace and Security in Our Nation	4.03	0.806	6 th
Tourism	4.02	0.804	7 th
Population Studies	4.01	0.802	8 th
Conflict Prevention and Management	3.99	0.799	9 th
The 1992 Constitution of Ghana	3.98	0.796	10 th
Human Resource Development	3.95	0.790	11 th
The Individual and the Community	3.69	0.739	12 th
Citizenship and Human Rights	3.60	0.720	13 th
Promoting Democracy and Political Stability	3.52	0.704	14 th
Science and Technology	3.46	0.692	15 th

Table 4 presents students' ratings of topics in the Junior High School Social Studies curriculum based on their level of interest, using mean scores and the Relative Importance Index (RII). Overall, the results indicate that students showed relatively high interest across most topics, with mean scores above the midpoint of the scale. The topic that generated the highest level of interest was Adolescent Reproductive Health (M = 4.25, RII = 0.851), ranking first. This was followed by Independent Ghana (M = 4.12, RII = 0.824) and Socialisation and Family Life (M = 4.08, RII = 0.816). Topics such as Understanding Our Natural World and Environmental Issues also ranked relatively high, reflecting students' growing awareness of environmental and scientific issues.

Conversely, topics such as Science and Technology (M = 3.46, RII = 0.692), Promoting Democracy and Political Stability (M = 3.52, RII = 0.704), and Citizenship and Human Rights (M = 3.60, RII = 0.720) recorded comparatively lower mean scores and RII values, suggesting lower levels of student interest. These findings imply that students tend to engage more with topics that are perceived as practical and directly relevant to their lives than those that are more abstract or institutional in nature.

Table 5 One-Way ANOVA Results on Students' Interest in Social Studies Across Class Levels

Class Level	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.679	2	.339	2.780	.063
Within Groups	43.454	356	.122		
Total	44.133	358			

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine differences in students' interest in Social Studies across class levels (JHS 1, JHS 2, and JHS 3). The

analysis revealed no statistically significant difference in interest among the three groups, $F(2, 356) = 2.78, p = .063$.

Table 6 Topics in the JHS Social Studies curriculum that pose teaching challenges to teachers

Topic	Mean	RII	Rank
The 1992 Constitution	4.36	0.871	1 st
Tourism	4.29	0.859	2 nd
Conflict Prevention and Management	4.13	0.827	3 rd
Human Resource Development	4.10	0.820	4 th
Citizenship and Human Rights	4.07	0.814	5 th
Promoting Democracy and Political Stability	4.05	0.811	6 th
Science and Technology	4.02	0.804	7 th
Independent Ghana	3.88	0.777	8 th
Adolescent Reproductive Health	3.84	0.768	9 th
Understanding Our Natural World	3.75	0.750	10 th
The Individual and the Community	3.56	0.713	11 th
Environmental Issues	3.53	0.705	12 th
Population Studies	3.52	0.704	13 th
Socialisation and Family Life	3.49	0.698	14 th
Peace and Security in Our Nation	3.40	0.680	15 th

Table 6 presents teachers' perceptions of topics in the JHS Social Studies curriculum that pose teaching challenges, ranked using mean scores and the Relative Importance Index (RII). The results show that *The 1992 Constitution* is the most challenging topic to teach (M = 4.36, RII = 0.871), followed by *Tourism* (M = 4.29, RII = 0.859) and *Conflict Prevention and Management* (M = 4.13, RII = 0.827). These topics are largely abstract, conceptually demanding, and often require extensive contextual knowledge and instructional resources. Conversely, topics such as *Peace and Security in Our Nation* (M = 3.40, RII = 0.680), *Socialisation and Family Life* (M = 3.49, RII = 0.698), and *Population Studies* (M = 3.52, RII = 0.704) were perceived as less

challenging to teach, possibly due to their familiarity and relevance to students' everyday experiences.

Overall, the findings indicate that teachers face greater instructional difficulty with civics-, governance-, and policy-oriented topics, highlighting the need for targeted professional development, improved teaching resources, and contextualised instructional strategies to enhance effective delivery of challenging Social Studies content.

Table 7 Independent Samples Test

Challenging Topics	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.						
Equal variances assumed	1.105	.295	1.34	110	.182	.1017	-.0483	.2516
Equal variances not assumed			1.32	87.28	.189	.1017	-.0510	.2543
			4	1				

Table 7 presents the independent samples *t*-test examining gender differences in average teaching challenges encountered in Social Studies under objective 2. Levene's test was not significant ($F = 1.105$, $p = .295$), indicating that the assumption of equal variances was met. Consequently, the results for equal variances assumed were interpreted. The *t*-test revealed no statistically significant difference between male and female teachers in their perceived teaching challenges ($t(110) = 1.344$, $p = .182$). The mean difference was small (0.10), and the 95% confidence interval included zero, suggesting that gender does not significantly influence teachers' perceptions of teaching challenges in Social Studies.

Table 8 Topics in the JHS Social Studies curriculum that present learning difficulties to students

Topic	Mean	RII	Rank
The 1992 Constitution of Ghana	4.28	0.856	1 st
Socialisation and Family Life	4.27	0.855	2 nd
Promoting Democracy and Political Stability	4.07	0.814	3 rd
Conflict Prevention and Management	4.06	0.813	4 th
Adolescent Reproductive Health	4.03	0.806	5 th
Understanding Our Natural World	4.03	0.806	6 th
Human Resource Development	4.02	0.804	7 th
The Individual and the Community	4.02	0.803	8 th
Citizenship and Human Rights	4.01	0.803	9 th
Environmental Issues	3.97	0.795	10 th
Peace and Security in Our Nation	3.95	0.791	11 th
Science and Technology	3.92	0.784	12 th
Tourism	3.80	0.760	13 th
Independent Ghana	3.52	0.704	14 th
Population Studies	3.46	0.692	15 th

Table 8 presents students' perceptions of Social Studies topics that pose learning difficulties, ranked using mean scores and the Relative Importance Index (RII). The findings indicate that *The 1992 Constitution of Ghana* is the most challenging topic for students (Mean = 4.28, RII = 0.856), suggesting substantial difficulty in understanding constitutional concepts and governance structures. This is closely followed by *Socialisation and Family Life* (Mean = 4.27, RII = 0.855), indicating that abstract social concepts and values also present significant learning challenges.

Other highly ranked difficult topics include *Promoting Democracy and Political Stability* (Mean = 4.07, RII = 0.814) and *Conflict Prevention and Management* (Mean = 4.06, RII = 0.813), reflecting students' struggles with political and civic-related content. In contrast, topics such as *Independent Ghana* (Mean = 3.52, RII = 0.704)

and *Population Studies* (Mean = 3.46, RII = 0.692) were perceived as relatively less challenging. Overall, the results suggest that students experience greater learning difficulties with abstract, civic, and governance-related topics, highlighting the need for more learner-centered and context-based instructional approaches.

Table 9 Factors that contribute to students' challenges in learning Social Studies at the JHS level

Factor	Yes	No	Total
The difficulty of concepts and ideas involved	215	144	359
	59.9%	40.1%	100%
Inadequate textbooks and learning materials	185	174	359
	51.5%	48.5%	100%
Limited time allocated for Social Studies lessons	209	150	359
	58.2%	41.8%	100%
Teaching methods used during lessons	207	152	359
	57.7%	42.3%	100%
Lack of practical activities and real-life examples	184	175	359
	51.3%	48.7%	100%
Difficulty remembering facts, dates, and concepts	215	144	359
	59.9%	40.1%	100%
Challenges with understanding English language used in lessons	216	143	359
	60.2%	39.8%	100%
Low personal interest in the subject	220	139	359
	61.3%	38.7%	100%
The belief that Social Studies is not useful in real life	184	175	359
	51.3%	48.7%	100%
Limited use of ICT and digital tools in teaching Social Studies	210	149	359
	58.5%	41.5%	100%

Table 9 presents students' perceptions of factors contributing to their challenges in learning Social Studies at the JHS level. The results show that a majority of students identified multiple interrelated factors as sources of difficulty. Notably, *low personal interest in the subject* was the most frequently reported factor, with 61.3% of respondents indicating it as a challenge, suggesting that affective factors play a significant role in students' learning experiences. Similarly, *challenges with understanding the English language used in lessons* (60.2%) and *difficulty remembering facts, dates, and concepts* (59.9%) were identified by a substantial proportion of students, highlighting cognitive and language-related barriers.

Instructional and structural factors were also prominent. More than half of the respondents indicated that *the difficulty of concepts and ideas involved* (59.9%), *limited time allocated for Social Studies lessons* (58.2%), *teaching methods used during lessons* (57.7%), and *limited use of ICT and digital tools* (58.5%) contributed to their learning challenges. In addition, slightly over half of the students reported *inadequate textbooks and learning materials* (51.5%) and *lack of practical activities and real-life examples* (51.3%) as obstacles. Although *the belief that Social Studies is not useful in real life* recorded a comparatively lower percentage (51.3%), it still reflects a significant perception issue. Overall, the findings suggest that students' challenges arise from a combination of motivational, instructional, linguistic, and resource-related factors.

Table 10 Correlation between Students' Interest in Social Studies and Learning Challenges

		Student Interest	Perceived Learning Challenges
Student Interest	Pearson Correlation	1	.011
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.834
	N	359	359
Perceived Learning Challenges	Pearson Correlation	.011	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.834	
	N	359	359

Table 10 shows a very weak positive correlation between students' interest in Social Studies and their perceived learning challenges ($r = .011$). The relationship is not statistically significant ($p = .834$), indicating that students' level of interest does not significantly relate to the challenges they experience in learning Social Studies. This suggests that learning difficulties may be influenced more by instructional, curricular, or contextual factors than by students' personal interest in the subject.

4.4 Discussion of Results

Objective 1: To identify topics in the JHS Social Studies curriculum that generate high interest among students.

The findings under Objective 1 indicate that students in the New Juaben North Municipality exhibit relatively high interest in several topics within the JHS Social Studies curriculum, with *Adolescent Reproductive Health* ranking highest, followed by topics such as *Independent Ghana, Socialisation and Family Life*, and *Understanding Our Natural World*. These results suggest that students are more engaged with topics that are personally relevant and directly connected to their lived experiences. Adolescent reproductive health, for example, is closely linked to students' development and daily life choices, making it intuitively appealing and meaningful to them. This aligns with evidence from wider educational research which

shows that students are more motivated to engage with curricular content when they perceive it as applicable to their lives and futures (Yaw et al., 2022). Students' interest in locally contextualised issues such as the history of Ghana, family and community relationships further demonstrates the importance of curriculum relevance.

In contrast, topics such as *Science and Technology* and *Promoting Democracy and Political Stability* scored lower in terms of interest. These topics may appear more abstract or less immediately relevant to students' day-to-day concerns, which could account for the relatively lower engagement. Research in Ghanaian contexts has shown that when Social Studies content is perceived as distant from students' practical realities, interest tends to decline (Mensah & Frimpong, 2020; as cited in Zengulaaru, 2022). In similar vein, studies elsewhere argue that educational subjects perceived as less connected to students' future aspirations often attract lower interest and cognitive investment (Adjei & Zuure, 2025). These findings underscore the necessity of contextualising Social Studies teaching and making topics relatable, such as by integrating localised case studies and problem-based learning that illustrate the relevance of governance and democratic principles to students' lives.

Moreover, the high interest in *Independent Ghana* challenges the common claim that Social Studies is viewed as less important than core subjects like English or Mathematics (Mensah, 2020; as cited in Zengulaaru, 2022). Instead, when content highlights national identity, historical legacy, and socio-cultural dynamics, students perceive the value of learning Social Studies. This implies that curriculum content that honours cultural and historical narratives can strengthen students' intrinsic motivation.

Collectively, the study's findings suggest that contextual relevance, personal significance, and real-world applicability are key predictors of student interest in Social Studies topics. These insights support curriculum designers and teachers to emphasise learner-centered pedagogies and content that resonate with students' experiences, thereby enhancing engagement and learning outcomes.

Objective 2: To examine topics in the JHS Social Studies curriculum that pose teaching challenges to teachers.

Objective 2 examined the Social Studies topics that pose teaching challenges to teachers, drawing on evidence from Tables 6 and 7. Findings from Table 6 reveal that *The 1992 Constitution of Ghana* emerged as the most challenging topic to teach (Mean = 4.36; RII = 0.871), followed by *Tourism* and *Conflict Prevention and Management*. These topics are conceptually dense, abstract, and often require legal, political, or interdisciplinary knowledge, which can be demanding for teachers at the JHS level. This result aligns with Frimpong (2020), who found that Ghanaian Social Studies teachers frequently struggle with constitution-related topics due to their technical language, legal interpretations, and limited instructional resources. Similarly, Osman and Mensah (2020) reported that governance-related topics are often inadequately explored in classrooms because teachers feel insufficiently prepared to facilitate sensitive or complex discussions.

The relatively high ranking of *Tourism* and *Human Resource Development* as challenging topics also reflects concerns raised in earlier studies. Yaw et al. (2022) noted that these topics require practical illustrations, field-based learning, and real-world examples, which are often constrained by time, funding, and lack of community-based resources. When such experiential opportunities are absent,

teachers tend to rely on textbook explanations, making instruction less effective and more difficult to manage pedagogically. This supports Bordoh et al. (2024), who argued that the absence of contextual teaching materials significantly increases teachers' instructional burden in Social Studies.

Table 7 further examined whether teaching challenges differed by gender using an independent samples *t*-test. The results showed no statistically significant difference between male and female teachers in their perception of teaching challenges ($t(110) = 1.344, p = .182$). This suggests that teaching difficulties associated with Social Studies topics are systemic rather than gender-specific. This finding is consistent with Mensah et al. (2023), who observed that challenges in implementing the Social Studies curriculum in Ghana are largely linked to curriculum complexity, insufficient professional development, and resource limitations, affecting teachers regardless of gender.

Taken together, the findings reinforce the view that teaching challenges in Social Studies stem more from structural and curricular factors than from individual teacher characteristics. While curriculum reforms in Ghana emphasise critical thinking and skills-based learning, teachers continue to grapple with content-heavy and abstract topics without adequate pedagogical support (Ministry of Education, 2019).

Objective 3: To identify topics in the JHS Social Studies curriculum that present learning difficulties to students.

Objective 3 examined topics in the JHS Social Studies curriculum that present learning difficulties to students. The findings indicate that students experience the greatest difficulty with *The 1992 Constitution of Ghana, Socialisation and Family Life*, and *Promoting Democracy and Political Stability*, as reflected in their high mean

scores and Relative Importance Index (RII) rankings. These results suggest that topics involving abstract civic concepts and complex social structures pose significant cognitive challenges for JHS students.

The prominence of constitutional and democratic topics as difficult areas aligns with previous studies in Ghanaian contexts. Frimpong (2020) observed that students often struggle to grasp governance-related concepts due to their abstract nature and limited exposure to practical civic engagement. Similarly, Osman and Mensah (2020) reported that constitutional studies require higher-order thinking skills, including interpretation and analysis, which many JHS students are still developing. The present findings reinforce the argument that age-related cognitive development and instructional approaches influence students' ability to comprehend abstract political concepts.

The difficulty associated with *Socialisation and Family Life* further highlights challenges in linking sociological theories to students' lived experiences. While these topics are familiar in content, students may struggle with conceptual frameworks used to explain social roles, norms, and institutions. This finding is consistent with Eshun (2020), who noted that students often fail to distinguish between everyday experiences and formal social concepts when instruction lacks contextualized examples.

Environmental and science-related topics, though ranked lower, still recorded relatively high mean values, indicating moderate difficulty. This supports the findings of Mensah et al. (2023), who argued that inadequate instructional resources and limited use of practical activities contribute to students' difficulties in understanding interdisciplinary Social Studies topics that draw from science and geography. The

relatively lower difficulty reported for *Independent Ghana* and *Population Studies* suggests that historical narratives and demographic topics are more accessible when taught using storytelling and real-life examples, as suggested by Levstik and Barton (2022). Overall, the findings suggest that students' learning difficulties are strongly associated with abstractness of content, instructional methods, and limited contextualisation.

Objective 4: To explore factors that contribute to students' challenges in learning Social Studies at the JHS level.

Objective 4 explored the factors contributing to students' challenges in learning Social Studies at the Junior High School (JHS) level. The findings indicate that a combination of cognitive, linguistic, motivational, instructional, and resource-related factors was perceived by students as barriers to effective learning. Among the most frequently reported issues were *low personal interest in the subject* (61.3%), *difficulty understanding the language used in lessons* (60.2%), and *difficulty remembering facts and concepts* (59.9%). These affective and cognitive barriers align with extant literature suggesting that students' engagement and comprehension are significantly influenced by both internal dispositions and the nature of the content (Adu-Gyamfi & Anderson, 2021; Mensah et al., 2023). Low interest, for example, can reduce attention and effort, thereby impairing memory and understanding (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; cited in Yaw et al., 2022).

The prominence of *difficulty of concepts and ideas* (59.9%) and *teaching methods* (57.7%) underscores the role of pedagogy in shaping learning experiences. These findings are consistent with research which shows that traditional, teacher-centered instructional strategies impede deep understanding and critical engagement,

particularly with Social Studies topics that require higher-order thinking (Frimpong, 2020; Eshun, 2020). If instruction relies heavily on rote learning rather than discussion, inquiry, and real-world application, students struggle to internalise complex concepts, leading to surface learning and disengagement.

Limited time allocated for Social Studies (58.2%) and limited use of ICT and digital tools (58.5%) further highlight structural and resource constraints that inhibit effective teaching and learning. These infrastructural issues resonate with findings by Mensah et al. (2023), who reported that inadequate instructional time and lack of multimedia resources limit opportunities for active learning and reinforce passive reception of content. The near parity in responses regarding *inadequate textbooks and learning materials (51.5%)* and *lack of practical examples (51.3%)* suggests that while some schools may have basic materials, many students still lack access to engaging and contextually relevant content.

The perception that Social Studies is *not useful in real life (51.3%)* complements the low interest reported, indicating a possible disconnect between curriculum content and students' lived realities. Prior studies have shown that when students perceive a subject as irrelevant, their motivation declines, which in turn affects engagement and achievement (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; cited in Yaw et al., 2022). This is particularly significant for Social Studies, a subject intended to foster civic competence, critical thinking, and social awareness.

Together, these findings suggest that students' challenges in learning Social Studies are multifaceted and interrelated. They span individual dispositions (interest and comprehension), instructional practices (methods and time allocation), and systemic resource limitations (materials and technology).

Integrated Analysis, Deductions and Theoretical Implications

Synthesising the findings across the four objectives revealed a complex but coherent picture of students' interests, challenges, and learning experiences in Junior High School (JHS) Social Studies within the New Juaben North Municipality. Collectively, the results suggest that student interest, curriculum content, pedagogical practice, and structural conditions are deeply interconnected, and weaknesses in any one dimension reverberate across the others.

Findings from Objective 1 showed that students expressed relatively high interest in topics such as *Adolescent Reproductive Health, Independent Ghana, and Socialisation and Family Life*. These topics are closely aligned with students' lived experiences, personal development, and immediate social realities. This supports the notion that relevance and contextualisation are central to sustaining interest in Social Studies (Yaw et al., 2022; Mensah et al., 2023). However, Objective 2 revealed that some of these same topics, alongside abstract civic and political themes such as *The 1992 Constitution* and *Tourism*, pose significant teaching challenges to teachers. This juxtaposition indicates a pedagogical tension: topics that are potentially engaging may still be difficult to teach effectively due to their conceptual depth, sensitivity, or lack of adequate instructional resources and teacher preparation (Frimpong, 2020). Objective 3 further deepens this analysis by showing that students experience considerable learning difficulties in many civic and governance-related topics, particularly *The 1992 Constitution, Promoting Democracy and Political Stability*, and *Conflict Prevention and Management*. These findings align with the teaching challenges reported by teachers, suggesting a curriculum-pedagogy-learning misalignment. Where teachers struggle to teach certain topics, students are more likely to struggle to learn them, reinforcing the idea that instructional quality mediates

curriculum effectiveness (Akowuah et al., 2025). This inference is strengthened by Objective 4, which identified key contributing factors to students' challenges, including low interest, language difficulties, abstract concepts, ineffective teaching methods, limited instructional time, and inadequate use of ICT.

Critically, the correlation analysis under Objective 4 revealed no statistically significant relationship between students' interest and perceived learning challenges. This finding suggests that interest alone is insufficient to overcome structural and instructional barriers. Even when students are interested, poor pedagogy, limited resources, and language constraints can still impede learning. This challenges simplistic assumptions that increasing interest will automatically lead to improved understanding and performance.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings have important implications. First, they strongly support constructivist learning theory, which emphasises that learners actively construct knowledge through meaningful interaction with content, context, and peers (Fosnot, 2013; cited in Yaw et al., 2022). The observed learning difficulties indicate that current instructional practices may not sufficiently support active meaning-making. Second, the results align with situational interest theory, which posits that interest is triggered and sustained when learning tasks are relevant, well-structured, and supported by engaging instruction (Hidi & Renninger, 2006; cited in Yalley et al., 2023). Where pedagogy fails, situational interest may not translate into deep learning. Third, the findings resonate with ecological systems theory, suggesting that students' learning is shaped by interacting classroom, school, and policy-level factors, such as time allocation, resources, and teacher capacity (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; cited in Mensah et al., 2023). The study therefore infers that improving Social Studies learning outcomes requires systemic rather than isolated interventions.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a synthesis of the entire study. It summarises the key findings arising from the data analysis, draws conclusions based on the research objectives, and discusses their implications for Social Studies teaching and learning. The chapter further provides practical recommendations for teachers, curriculum developers, educational policymakers, and other stakeholders, and highlights areas for future research to enhance the effectiveness and relevance of Social Studies education in Ghana.

5.2 Summary of Findings

This study examined students' interests in the study of Social Studies at the Junior High School (JHS) level within the New Juaben North Municipality, with particular emphasis on curriculum content, teaching challenges, learning difficulties, and factors influencing students' engagement with the subject. Guided by four specific objectives, the findings provide a comprehensive picture of how curriculum intentions, classroom practices, and learner experiences interact to shape students' interest in Social Studies.

With regard to Objective 1, the study found that students generally demonstrated moderate to high interest in several Social Studies topics, especially those closely linked to their personal lives and societal realities. Topics such as *Adolescent Reproductive Health*, *Independent Ghana*, *Socialisation and Family Life*, *Understanding Our Natural World*, and *Environmental Issues* ranked highest in terms of interest. These topics recorded high mean scores and Relative Importance Index (RII) values, suggesting that students are more engaged when lesson content is

practical, relatable, and directly connected to contemporary social and developmental issues. Conversely, abstract and institution-focused topics such as *Science and Technology*, *Promoting Democracy and Political Stability*, and *Citizenship and Human Rights* attracted comparatively lower interest. The ANOVA results further revealed no statistically significant difference in students' interest levels across class levels, indicating that interest in Social Studies is relatively consistent among JHS 1, JHS 2, and JHS 3 students.

Findings relating to Objective 2 revealed that teachers experience considerable difficulty in teaching certain Social Studies topics. *The 1992 Constitution of Ghana* was identified as the most challenging topic to teach, followed by *Tourism*, *Conflict Prevention and Management*, and *Human Resource Development*. These topics are conceptually demanding and often require interdisciplinary knowledge, legal understanding, or practical exposure that teachers may lack. The independent samples *t*-test showed no significant gender difference in teachers' perceptions of teaching challenges, suggesting that the difficulties encountered are systemic rather than gender-specific.

Regarding Objective 3, the study established that students also face notable learning difficulties in several Social Studies topics. Similar to the teachers' responses, students identified *The 1992 Constitution of Ghana*, *Socialisation and Family Life*, *Promoting Democracy and Political Stability*, and *Conflict Prevention and Management* as the most difficult topics to learn. These topics require abstract reasoning, interpretation of civic concepts, and application of theoretical knowledge, which many students find challenging. Topics such as *Population Studies* and *Independent Ghana* were ranked as less difficult, likely due to their concrete nature and familiarity.

Finally, findings on Objective 4 showed that multiple factors contribute to students' challenges in learning Social Studies. Key factors included low personal interest in the subject, language difficulties associated with English as the medium of instruction, the abstract nature of concepts, limited instructional time, ineffective teaching methods, and inadequate use of ICT and practical learning activities. The correlation analysis revealed a very weak and statistically insignificant relationship between students' interest and learning challenges, indicating that while interest and challenges coexist, learning difficulties are influenced by a broader combination of instructional, curricular, and contextual factors rather than interest alone.

Overall, the findings highlight a persistent misalignment between the intended goals of the Social Studies curriculum and classroom realities. While students show interest in relevant and practical topics, both teachers and learners continue to struggle with abstract, content-heavy areas of the curriculum, underscoring the need for improved pedagogical support, contextualised teaching approaches, and enhanced instructional resources.

5.3 Conclusion

This study examined students' interests in the study of Social Studies at the Junior High School level within the New Juaben North Municipality, with particular attention to curriculum content, teaching challenges, learning difficulties, and factors influencing student engagement. The findings indicate that students' interest in Social Studies is not uniformly low but varies considerably across topics, with greater interest shown in content that is practical, relatable, and closely connected to learners' personal and societal experiences. Topics that are abstract, institutional, or conceptually complex tend to generate less interest and pose greater challenges for both teachers and students.

The study further concludes that teaching and learning challenges in Social Studies are largely systemic rather than individual, as difficulties were linked to curriculum complexity, limited instructional resources, inadequate pedagogical strategies, and insufficient integration of practical and ICT-based learning approaches. Importantly, the weak relationship between students' interest and learning challenges suggests that improving interest alone is insufficient to enhance learning outcomes without addressing broader instructional and curricular constraints.

Overall, the study underscores the need for stronger alignment between curriculum intentions and classroom practice. For Social Studies to effectively fulfil its civic and educational mandate, deliberate efforts must be made to support teachers, contextualise content, and adopt learner-centered pedagogies that make the subject meaningful, engaging, and accessible to all students at the JHS level.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. The Ghana Education Service (GES), in collaboration with District Education Offices and Teacher Education Universities, should organise regular in-service training and workshops for Social Studies teachers, with a focus on learner-centered, inquiry-based, and activity-oriented pedagogical strategies. Such training should specifically target the teaching of abstract and conceptually demanding topics (e.g., the 1992 Constitution, democracy, and governance) to enhance instructional effectiveness and student engagement.
2. The Ministry of Education (MoE) and Curriculum Research and Development Division (CRDD) or National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

(NaCCA) should ensure the timely provision of updated Social Studies textbooks, teaching guides, and ICT-supported instructional materials aligned with the current JHS Social Studies curriculum. Schools should also be supported with multimedia tools to promote the use of practical examples, simulations, and real-life case studies during lessons.

3. The New Juaben North Municipal Education Directorate, through its School Improvement Support Officers (SISOs), should intensify classroom supervision and pedagogical support to ensure that the learner-centered intentions of the Social Studies curriculum are effectively translated into classroom practice. Emphasis should be placed on instructional methods that encourage discussion, critical thinking, and application of knowledge rather than rote memorisation.
4. School heads and Social Studies teachers, with support from the Municipal Education Directorate, should actively integrate local community issues, resource persons, and field-based learning activities into Social Studies instruction. This approach will help learners appreciate the real-life relevance of Social Studies concepts, thereby improving student interest, motivation, and overall learning outcomes.

5.5 Limitations of the Study

Despite the relevance and rigour of this study, certain limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study adopted a cross-sectional survey design, which captured students' and teachers' perceptions at a single point in time. As a result, changes in students' interest levels or teaching practices over time could not be

examined, limiting the ability to make causal inferences about the relationship between instructional factors and student interest in Social Studies.

Second, the study relied primarily on self-reported data collected through questionnaires. Such data are susceptible to response biases, including social desirability bias and subjective interpretation of questionnaire items. Some respondents may have overstated or understated their interest levels or challenges, which could affect the accuracy of the findings.

Third, the study was geographically delimited to Junior High Schools within the New Juaben North Municipality. While the findings provide valuable insights into the local context, they may not be fully generalisable to all JHS settings across Ghana, particularly in rural or differently resourced districts.

Finally, although the quantitative approach allowed for the analysis of trends and patterns, it did not provide in-depth qualitative explanations for some of the observed challenges. The absence of interviews or classroom observations may have limited deeper understanding of contextual and instructional dynamics influencing students' interest in Social Studies.

5.6 Suggestions for Further Studies

Future studies should adopt mixed-method or longitudinal research designs to provide deeper insights into how students' interest in Social Studies develops over time and the contextual factors influencing it. Further research could also extend to other municipalities or regions in Ghana for broader generalisation and incorporate classroom observations and interviews to complement quantitative findings and enrich understanding of instructional practices.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire 1 (Students)

Dear Respondent,

This questionnaire seeks information on your interest in Social Studies, topics you find interesting or challenging, and factors influencing your learning of Social Studies. Your responses are confidential and will be used strictly for academic purposes.

Section A: Demographic Information

Please tick (✓) the option that applies to you.

1. **Gender**

Male Female

2. **Age Range**

Below 15 15–17 18 or older

3. **Class/Grade Level**

JHS 1 JHS 2 JHS 3

Section B: Students' General Interest in Social Studies

On a scale of **1–5**, (*1 = Not Interested, 2 = Slightly Interested, 3 = Interested, 4 = Very Interested, 5 = Extremely Interested*). Tick (✓) the option that best describes you.

Label	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
IISS1	I enjoy learning Social Studies as a school subject.					
IISS2	The content of the Social Studies curriculum is interesting to me.					
IISS3	Social Studies textbooks and learning materials make learning enjoyable.					
IISS4	Teaching and learning resources used in Social Studies lessons motivate me to learn.					
IISS5	Teaching methods used by my teacher increase my interest in Social Studies.					
IISS6	Assessment methods (tests, projects, group work) make Social Studies interesting.					

Section C: Curriculum Topics that Interest Students

Using the same **1–5 interest scale**, indicate how interesting you find each topic.

Label	Topic	1	2	3	4	5
TOI1	Environmental Issues					
TOI2	Understanding Our Natural World					
TOI3	Adolescent Reproductive Health					
TOI4	Socialisation and Family Life					
TOI5	Population Studies					
TOI6	The Individual and the Community					
TOI7	Citizenship and Human Rights					

Label	Topic	1	2	3	4	5
TOI8	Conflict Prevention and Management					
TOI9	The 1992 Constitution of Ghana					
TOI10	Peace and Security in Our Nation					
TOI11	Promoting Democracy and Political Stability					
TOI12	Science and Technology					
TOI13	Human Resource Development					
TOI14	Tourism					
TOI15	Independent Ghana					

Section D: Curriculum Topics Students Find Challenging

On a scale of 1–5, (1 = Not Challenging, 2 = Slightly Challenging, 3 = Moderately Challenging, 4 = Very Challenging, 5 = Extremely Challenging)

Label	Topic	1	2	3	4	5
CT1	Environmental Issues					
CT2	Understanding Our Natural World					
CT3	Adolescent Reproductive Health					
CT4	Socialisation and Family Life					
CT5	Population Studies					
CT6	The Individual and the Community					
CT7	Citizenship and Human Rights					
CT8	Conflict Prevention and Management					
CT9	The 1992 Constitution					
CT10	Peace and Security in Our Nation					
CT11	Promoting Democracy and Political Stability					
CT12	Science and Technology					
CT13	Human Resource Development					
CT14	Tourism					
CT15	Independent Ghana					

Section E: Factors Contributing to Learning Challenges

Indicate whether each statement applies to you by ticking **Yes** or **No**.

Label	I find some Social Studies topics difficult because of...	Yes	No
SOC1	The difficulty of concepts and ideas involved.		
SOC2	Inadequate textbooks and learning materials.		
SOC3	Limited time allocated for Social Studies lessons.		
SOC4	Teaching methods used during lessons.		
SOC5	Lack of practical activities and real-life examples.		
SOC6	Difficulty remembering facts, dates, and concepts.		
SOC7	Challenges with understanding English language used in lessons.		
SOC8	Low personal interest in the subject.		
SOC9	The belief that Social Studies is not useful in real life.		
SOC10	Limited use of ICT and digital tools in teaching Social Studies.		

Questionnaire 2 (Teachers)

Dear Respondent,

This questionnaire seeks information on your interest in Social Studies, topics you find interesting or challenging, and factors influencing your learning of Social Studies. Your responses are confidential and will be used strictly for academic purposes.

Section A: Demographic and Professional Information

Please tick (✓) the option that best describes you.

1. **Gender**

Male Female

2. **Age Range**

Below 30 years 30–39 years 40–49 years 50 years and above

3. **Highest Professional Qualification**

Diploma in Education

Bachelor's Degree

Master's Degree

Other (Specify): _____

4. **Teaching Experience in Social Studies**

Below 5 years 5–10 years 11–15 years Above 15 years

Section B: Teachers' Perception of Students' Interest in Social Studies

This section addresses **Research Objective 1** (students' interest in Social Studies).

Using a 5-point Likert scale (*1 = Very Low Interest, 2 = Low Interest, 3 = Moderate Interest, 4 = High Interest, 5 = Very High Interest*), rate your perception of students' interest.

Label	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
TPSI1	Students' overall interest in Social Studies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TPSI2	Students' interest in Social Studies lesson activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TPSI3	Students' interest in Social Studies textbooks and learning materials	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TPSI4	Students' response to teaching and learning resources used	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TPSI5	Students' engagement during discussions and group activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TPSI6	Students' motivation during assessment and evaluation activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section C: Social Studies Curriculum Topics that Generate High Student Interest

This section directly supports **Research Objective 1** and reflects **core strands of the Ghana JHS Social Studies curriculum**.

Using the scale (*1 = Not Interesting, 2 = Slightly Interesting, 3 = Moderately Interesting, 4 = Interesting, 5 = Very Interesting*), rate students' level of interest.

Label	Curriculum Topic	1	2	3	4	5
TOI1	Environmental issues and sustainability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TOI2	The individual and the community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TOI3	Citizenship and human rights	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TOI4	Peace, security, and conflict management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TOI5	Ghana's independence and national identity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TOI6	Democracy and governance (1992 Constitution)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TOI7	Population and development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TOI8	Socialisation and adolescent issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TOI9	Economic and financial issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TOI10	Science, technology, and national development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section D: Curriculum Topics that Pose Teaching Challenges to Teachers

This section aligns with **Research Objective 2**.

Using the scale (*1 = Not Challenging, 2 = Slightly Challenging, 3 = Moderately Challenging, 4 = Challenging, 5 = Very Challenging*), indicate the extent of difficulty you experience teaching the following topics.

Label	Curriculum Topic	1	2	3	4	5
TCT1	Environmental Issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TCT2	Understanding Our Natural World	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TCT3	Adolescent Reproductive Health	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TCT4	Socialisation and Family Life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TCT5	Population Studies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TCT6	The Individual and the Community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TCT7	Citizenship and Human Rights	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TCT8	Conflict Prevention and Management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TCT9	The 1992 Constitution	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TCT10	Peace and Security in Our Nation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TCT11	Promoting Democracy and Political Stability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TCT12	Science and Technology	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TCT13	Human Resource Development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TCT14	Tourism	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TCT15	Independent Ghana	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section E: Curriculum Topics that Present Learning Difficulties to Students

This section addresses **Research Objective 3**.

Using the scale (*1 = Not Challenging, 2 = Slightly Challenging, 3 = Moderately Challenging, 4 = Challenging, 5 = Very Challenging*), indicate the extent of difficulty you experience teaching the following topics.

Label	Curriculum Topic	1	2	3	4	5
SLD1	Environmental Issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
SLD2	Understanding Our Natural World	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
SLD3	Adolescent Reproductive Health	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
SLD4	Socialisation and Family Life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
SLD5	Population Studies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
SLD6	The Individual and the Community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
SLD7	Citizenship and Human Rights	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
SLD8	Conflict Prevention and Management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
SLD9	The 1992 Constitution	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
SLD10	Peace and Security in Our Nation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
SLD11	Promoting Democracy and Political Stability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
SLD12	Science and Technology	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
SLD13	Human Resource Development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
SLD14	Tourism	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
SLD15	Independent Ghana	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section F: Factors Contributing to Students' Learning Challenges in Social Studies

This section aligns directly with **Research Objective 4**.

Indicate your level of agreement using, (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 2 = *Disagree*, 3 = *Neutral*, 4 = *Agree*, 5 = *Strongly Agree*)

Label	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
FCL1	The concepts in Social Studies are too abstract for students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
FCL2	Inadequate teaching and learning materials affect understanding	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
FCL3	Teaching methods used do not sufficiently engage students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
FCL4	Limited use of practical examples affects comprehension	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
FCL5	Students perceive Social Studies as less relevant than other subjects	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
FCL6	Insufficient time allocation affects effective teaching	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
FCL7	Limited integration of ICT reduces student engagement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>