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**ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL STUDIES  
EDUCATION AND STUDENTS' LEADERSHIP SKILLS  
DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Research has shown that education, particularly Social Studies, plays a crucial role in shaping skills. Despite the prominence of Social Studies in Nigerian tertiary institutions, there is limited empirical evidence exploring its impact on students' leadership skills development. This study analyzes the relationship between Social Studies Education and the development of leadership skills among students in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Employing a mixed-methods approach, data was collected from 400 students and 20 lecturers across 10 institutions in Southwest Nigeria using questionnaires and interviews. Results indicate that the Social Studies curriculum is highly effective in instilling foundational leadership values, with strong emphasis on ethics (Mean=4.3) and critical thinking (Mean=4.1). Consequently, a significant majority of students (72%) felt prepared for leadership roles, and 65% had held formal positions. However, a "theory-practice gap" was identified, with lower competence in applied skills like decision-making (Mean=3.4) and conflict resolution (Mean=2.9). A multiple regression analysis confirmed that challenges, particularly a theoretical focus ( $\beta = -.38, p < .001$ ), significantly hinder comprehensive leadership development. The study concludes that while Social Studies successfully cultivates leadership disposition, it requires a strategic shift towards experiential learning methodologies to bridge the skill application gap and fully realize its potential in developing actionable leadership competencies.

**KEYWORDS:** Social Studies Education, Leadership Skills, Theory-Practice Gap, Tertiary Institutions, Nigeria, Curriculum Development.

## INTRODUCTION

Leadership is an essential skill for personal and societal development, and education plays a critical role in cultivating these skills. Social Studies Education, as an interdisciplinary subject, focuses on teaching societal values, civic responsibility, and social interaction, which are foundational to leadership development. Social Studies Education is designed to provide students with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to participate actively and responsibly in civic life. Leadership skills, on the other hand, are essential for guiding, inspiring, and achieving collective goals. Research has shown that education, particularly Social Studies, plays a crucial role in shaping leadership capabilities by fostering critical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving skills (Mezieobi, 2013). Despite the prominence of Social Studies in Nigerian tertiary institutions, there is limited empirical evidence exploring its impact on students' leadership skills development. This study therefore seeks to analyze the relationship between Social Studies Education and students' leadership skills development in Nigerian tertiary institutions. By identifying the connection between the two, the research aims to provide actionable insights into curriculum improvement and fostering leadership skills among students.

### Research Objectives

1. To evaluate the extent to which Social Studies Education incorporates leadership development components in its curriculum.
2. To assess the leadership skills exhibited by students who study Social Studies in Nigerian tertiary institutions.
3. To explore the perceptions of students and educators regarding the role of Social Studies Education in fostering leadership skills.
4. To identify challenges in using Social Studies Education as a tool for leadership development.
5. To propose strategies for enhancing the effectiveness of Social Studies Education in promoting leadership skills.

### Research Questions

1. What leadership development components are integrated into the Social Studies Education curriculum?
2. How do students studying Social Studies demonstrate leadership skills compared to their peers in other disciplines?

3. What are the perceptions of students and educators about the role of Social Studies Education in leadership development?
4. What challenges hinder the integration of leadership skill development into Social Studies Education?
5. What strategies can be adopted to enhance the impact of Social Studies Education on leadership skills development?

### **Hypothesis**

Challenges in curriculum implementation (theoretical focus, outdated content) do not significantly affect the effectiveness of Social Studies education in developing leadership skills.

### **Literature Review**

#### Conceptual Framework: Social Studies Education and Leadership Skills

Social Studies Education is interdisciplinary, drawing from history, geography, sociology, and political science to promote civic competence (Barr et al., 1977). It emphasizes values such as democracy, social justice, and community participation. According to Ololube (2009), Social Studies provides a platform for students to explore societal issues, develop empathy, and cultivate leadership traits. Leadership skills encompass a range of competencies, including communication, teamwork, conflict resolution, and strategic planning (Northouse, 2016). The development of these skills requires a combination of theoretical knowledge and practical experiences, both of which are embedded in the Social Studies curriculum. Ajiboye and Tella (2007) argue that Social Studies fosters leadership by encouraging students to analyze societal challenges and develop solutions collaboratively.

### **The Role of Social Studies Education in Leadership Development**

Several scholars have explored the relationship between Social Studies Education and leadership skills. According to Nwaubani and Mezieobi (2012), Social Studies serves as a tool for nurturing responsible citizens who can lead in diverse societal contexts. They argue that the subject's focus on civic engagement and moral reasoning directly correlates with leadership development.

**Civic Education and Leadership:** Civic education, a core component of Social Studies, provides students with an understanding of democratic principles, governance, and active citizenship. Banks (2008) emphasizes that civic education enhances leadership skills by

teaching students the importance of accountability, transparency, and ethical decision-making.

**Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving:** Social Studies encourages critical thinking and problem-solving, which are essential for leadership. Parker (2012) highlights that the inquiry-based approach in Social Studies enables students to analyze complex issues, make informed decisions, and take initiative in group settings.

**Teamwork and Collaboration:** Leadership often involves working with diverse groups to achieve common goals. Mezieobi (2013) notes that Social Studies projects and group discussions help students develop teamwork and collaboration skills, preparing them for leadership roles.

### **Empirical Studies on Social Studies and Leadership Skills Development**

Adebayo and Yusuf (2015) conducted a study on Nigerian secondary school students, finding that those exposed to a robust Social Studies curriculum exhibited higher levels of leadership qualities, such as communication and conflict resolution, compared to their peers in other disciplines. Obi and Ekpe (2017) examined the role of Social Studies in promoting civic responsibility among university students in southeastern Nigeria. Their findings revealed that students who actively participated in Social Studies classes were more likely to take on leadership roles in student organizations. However, some studies highlight challenges in achieving these outcomes. For example, Adekunle and Oladipo (2018) identified gaps in teacher training and curriculum design, which limit the effectiveness of Social Studies in developing leadership skills.

### **Theoretical Perspectives**

The relationship between Social Studies Education and leadership skills can be analyzed through several theoretical lenses:

**Constructivist Theory:** Vygotsky's constructivist theory posits that learning is a social process, and students construct knowledge through interaction with peers and instructors (Vygotsky, 1978). Social Studies aligns with this theory by fostering collaborative learning environments where leadership skills can be developed.

Transformational Leadership Theory: Burns (1978) defines transformational leadership as the process of inspiring and empowering individuals to achieve collective goals. Social Studies Education prepares students for transformational leadership by emphasizing values such as equity, justice, and social responsibility.

Civic Competence Model: Banks (2008) introduced the civic competence model, which links education to active participation in democratic processes. Social Studies, through its focus on civic education, equips students with the skills needed to lead effectively in diverse societal contexts.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between Social Studies Education and leadership skills development.

### **Population and Sampling**

Students enrolled in Social Studies programs in southwest Nigerian tertiary schools formed the population of this study as well as educators teaching Social Studies and curriculum developers in tertiary institutions.

### **Sampling Technique:**

A stratified random sampling method was used to select participants from federal, state, and private tertiary institutions to ensure representation. The sample size included 200 university undergraduates, 200 NCE students and 20 lecturers from 10 tertiary institutions within southwest Nigeria

### **Data Collection Methods**

Structured questionnaires was administered to students to assess their leadership skills and perceptions while semi-structured interviews were conducted with educators and curriculum developers to explore their insights on the relationship between Social Studies Education and leadership development.

Document Analysis was carried out by conducting an analysis of Social Studies curricula to identify leadership components.

**Data Analysis Techniques**

Data obtained from the respondents was analyzed using frequency count, simple percentages, while multiple regression analysis was used to test hypothesis at  $p < 0.05$ . The qualitative data was analyzed thematically to interpret interview data and curriculum content.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents. (N=400 Students)**

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Level of Study	NCE	200	50%
	Undergraduate	180	45%
	Postgraduate	20	5%
Gender	Male	210	52.50%
	Female	190	47.50%
Age Range	16-20	150	37.50%
	21-25	220	55%
	26-30	30	7.50%

The sample is well-distributed across NCE and undergraduate levels, which are the core cohorts for Social Studies education in the Nigerian tertiary system. The lower representation of postgraduates is typical. The gender distribution is nearly equal, and the majority of respondents fall within the 21-25 age range, reflecting the standard age bracket for tertiary education in Nigeria. This demographic spread enhances the generalizability of the findings within the study's context.

**Table 2: Perceived Integration of Leadership Components in Social Studies Curriculum. (Mean Scores, 1-5 scale)**

Curriculum Component	Mean Score
Emphasis on ethics, social justice, and civic responsibility	4.3
Emphasis on critical thinking and analysis	4.1
Frequent group projects and discussions	3.8
Assignments requiring effective communication	3.6
Requirement to make and defend evidence-based decisions	3.4
Teaching of conflict resolution and negotiation skills	2.9
Overall Mean	3.7

The results indicate that students perceive the Social Studies curriculum to be strongest in instilling ethical and civic values (Mean=4.3) and fostering critical thinking (Mean=4.1), which are foundational theoretical aspects of leadership. However, there is a noticeable decline in scores for more applied, interactive skills. The high frequency of group work (Mean=3.8) is positive, but the lower scores for communication (3.6) and, particularly, the

explicit teaching of conflict resolution (2.9), suggest that the potential of these activities for leadership development may not be fully realized. The curriculum appears strong on theory but weaker on practical, transferable leadership skill development.

**Table 3: Self-Assessed Leadership Skills Competence.(Mean Scores, 1-5 scale)**

<b>Leadership Skill</b>	<b>Mean Score</b>
Civic Responsibility	4.2
Teamwork and Collaboration	4
Critical Thinking	3.9
Communication	3.5
C4. Decision-Making	3.4
C5. Problem-Solving	3.3
Overall Mean	3.7

This table mirrors the findings from Table 2. Students feel most competent in areas directly related to the core content of Social Studies: Civic Responsibility (4.2) and Teamwork (4.0). The self-rating for Critical Thinking (3.9) is also high, aligning with the curricular emphasis. However, the lower self-ratings for Decision-Making (3.4) and Problem-Solving (3.3) are critical. These are active leadership skills that require not just knowledge but practice and application. The gap suggests that while the curriculum builds a strong foundational mindset for leadership, it may not be as effective in developing the decisive, action-oriented competencies required of leaders.

**Table 4: Student Perceptions and Leadership Role Preparedness.**

<b>Perception Metric</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
D1. Social Studies has prepared me for leadership roles.	Agree/Strongly Agree	72%
	Neutral	18%
	Disagree/Strongly Disagree	10%
D2. Have held a formal leadership position.	Yes	65%
	No	35%
D3. (Of those who held a position) Felt prepared due to Social Studies.	Prepared/Very Prepared	70%
	Neutral	20%
	Unprepared/Very Unprepared	10%

This table provides compelling evidence of a positive correlation. A strong majority (72%) of students believe Social Studies has prepared them for leadership, and this is substantiated by the high percentage (65%) who have actually held a formal position. Furthermore, among

those who held a position, 70% felt prepared because of their studies. This triangulates data from perception (D1), behavior (D2), and reflected experience (D3), strongly suggesting that Social Studies Education is a significant enabler of leadership development. The qualitative response (D4) frequently cited understanding group dynamics and learning about civic duties as the most significant contributions.

**Table 5: Challenges and Recommended Changes (Student Perspectives)**

Challenge (E1)	Percentage Identifying (%)
Theoretical focus with little practical application	45%
Teaching methods that do not encourage participation	25%
Outdated curriculum content	20%
Lack of qualified lecturers	10%
Most Recommended Change (E2 - Qualitative Theme)	Frequency
Include more practical projects, simulations, and community engagement.	60%
Update curriculum to include contemporary case studies.	25%
Train lecturers in interactive teaching methods.	15%

The challenges identified by students directly address the gaps found in Tables 2 and 3. The dominant challenge is a theory-practice gap, with 45% of students critiquing the lack of practical application. This explains the lower scores in applied skills like conflict resolution and problem-solving. The recommended changes are perfectly aligned solutions, calling for more hands-on, experiential learning. This indicates that students are aware of what is needed to bridge the gap between learning about leadership and developing the skills to lead.

**Table 6: Hypothesis Results**

**Multiple Regression: Challenges Predicting Leadership Skills Development**

Predictor	B	SE B	$\beta$	t	p
Constant	4.25	0.15		28.33	< .001
Theoretical Focus	-0.31	0.05	-.38	-6.20	< .001
Outdated Content	-0.18	0.06	-.19	-3.00	.003
Non-participatory Methods	-0.15	0.05	-.17	-3.00	.003

$R^2 = .25$ ,  $F(3, 396) = 44.00$ ,  $p < .001$

The multiple regression model was statistically significant,  $F(3, 396) = 44.00$ ,  $p < .001$ , with the three challenges accounting for 25% of the variance in leadership skills development. Theoretical focus was the strongest negative predictor ( $\beta = -.38$ ,  $p < .001$ ), followed by outdated content ( $\beta = -.19$ ,  $p = .003$ ) and non-participatory methods ( $\beta = -.17$ ,  $p = .003$ ).

## CONCLUSION

The data presents a clear narrative: Social Studies Education in Nigerian tertiary institutions is highly effective at building the foundational values and awareness necessary for leadership (the why and what), but less effective at developing the applied, practical competencies (the how). Students emerge with a strong sense of civic duty and are very likely to step into leadership roles. However, the curriculum and teaching methods seem to lag in providing them with the robust toolkit particularly in decision-making, problem-solving, and conflict resolution needed to excel in those roles. The primary challenge is not a lack of intent, but a pedagogical gap that prioritizes theoretical knowledge over experiential skill-building. The challenges identified by students directly address the gaps. The dominant challenge is a theory-practice gap, with 45% of students critiquing the lack of practical application. This explains the lower scores in applied skills like conflict resolution and problem-solving. The recommended changes are perfectly aligned solutions, calling for more hands-on, experiential learning. This indicates that students are aware of what is needed to bridge the gap between learning about leadership and developing the skills to lead.

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