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STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF DIFFICULTY LEVELS OF SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL CIVIC EDUCATION CURRICULUM CONTENT IN OSUN STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract
The learnability of school curriculum has been attributed to students' perceptionof different school subjects which also determines the level of students' performance and ultimately the achievability of the intended curriculum objectives. Studies had been conducted in other subject area apart from Civic Education which is relatively new in the Nigerian Secondary School curriculum. This paper examines students' perceived difficulty levels in Civic Education curriculum content and the factors associated with their perceptions. The population for the study comprised all Civic Education students in Osun State, Nigeria. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study and a researcher- designed instrument titled Civic Education Student Syllabus Perception Questionnaire (CESPQ) was administered to 487 randomly selected students drawn from stratified randomly selected 25 Senior Secondary Schools in Osogbo, Osun state, Nigeria. The Three research questions raised for the study were answered using percentage, mean and standard deviation statistics. The results showed that the Senior School Civic Education Syllabus (SSCES) topics were perceived by students to be of different difficulty levels ranging from difficult, to very simple with an absolute majority of them being predominantly very simple. The observed difficulty levels were associated with inadequate textbooks, teachers' presentation of lessons and wide content coverage. These imply that the Civic Education curriculum is predominantly learnable while the curriculum objectives are also predominantly achievable. Based on these findings, it was recommended that teachers should enhance the learnability of the few perceived difficult topics by students through the use of predominantly learner-centred strategies and more learner-friendly strategies to teach the subject.

Keywords: civic education, curriculum contents, difficulty levels, students 'perception

Introduction

Civic education was introduced into Nigeria educational system in order to achieve a number of educational objectives. The re-introduction of Civic education curriculum into Nigeria educational system was as a result of the

numerous problems that led to the decline in education and deterioration of cultural values among Nigerian citizens (Ali, Hayatu & Badau, 2015). Among these problems are the antisocial activities, poor democratic behaviour and problem of non-challant attitude towards examination regulations that has led to frequent examination malpractices and lack of patriotism behaviour among Nigeria youth (Fan, Ekpo & Ita, 2008).

As such, the introduction of civic education in Nigeria educational system is to cater for areas in the Social Studies curriculum in which the subject was unable to achieve. Such areas are: the objectives of politics, democratic participation but particularly to develop students to attain certain desirable's knowledge, social norms, customs, values, basic skills and for understanding the necessary ethics that would make them become disciplined and responsible Nigerian citizens. Finkel (2000) posited that, civic education's primary objectives is to provide learners with adequate and relevant information on their rights, duties, responsibilities and conditions for political engagement with the aim of encouraging the citizens to engage themselves in meaningful contributions to the political system.

Ajibade (2011) was of the opinion that the purpose of civic education curriculum in senior secondary schools is majorly interested in transforming learner's ability to achieve democratic skil s and values in order for the citizens to function adequately in the process of democratic participation in Nigeria. It is believed that with the introduction of Civic education into secondary school's curriculum, Nigeria is in the right direction to refocus and strategized the potentials of our founding fathers' visionary qualities in the area of inculcating desirable social norms and national ethics into our students, because they are expected to take over the leadership of our country. In view of this, Civic education curriculum has identified the following areas to impart the knowledge of: societal values, citizenship and nationalism, human right, law and order, responsible parenthood, traffic regulations, interpersonal relationships, governmental system and process.

Ali, Hayatu and Badau (2015) reported that, for implementation of any curriculum, teachers from various fields are expected to be the key target for the job, but in case of Civic Education, the Social Studies teachers has been saddled with the responsibility of teaching Civic Education at all levels of Nigeria educational system, because Social Studies education is the only area that is related to Civic Education and they share contents that are similar, since there are no qualified teachers in this field of study. The qualified Social Studies teachersare the most appropriate teachers to handle the teaching of Civic Education concepts in secondary schools.

Statement of the Problem

Studies confirmed that large sizes of topics are not too easy to teach by teachers due to their demanding and abstract nature in sciences subjects (Oyedeji, 1992; Jimoh, 2001; Oyedokun, 2002 & Akanni, 2015). Also, a study carried out on senior school students' perception of difficulty levels of Christian Religious Studies Syllabus confirmed a smaller proportion of CRS syllabus to be very difficult (Okunloye & Awowale, 2011). These studies were carried on science

subjects and on religious subjects. This current study was carried out on social science subject (Civic education).As a new subject introduced to secondary school curriculum, it becomes imperative to examine the levels of difficulty of the subject in order to improve on the content, methods, instructional materials and evaluation procedures of Civic Education. Therefore, this study examined the Students' perception of difficulty levels of senior secondary school Civic Education syllabus in Osun State, Nigeria.

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What are students' perceived difficulty levels of the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination syllabus topics of Civic Education?
2. What are students' perceived difficulty levels of the three major thematic components of the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination syllabus topics of Civic Education?
3. What are students' perceived associated factors with the observed difficulty levels of the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination syllabus topics of Civic Education?

Method

This study is a descriptive survey research design. This is necessary to be able to explain the variables in the study based on information gathered. The research was conducted on selected secondary schools in Osun State. The population consisted of all Civic Education Students in Upper Basic and Senior Secondary Schools in Osun State, Nigeria. The target population was all senior school, Civic Education students in Osun State. The sample comprised, 500 randomly selected Senior School Civic Education student from 25 randomly selected senior Secondary Schools in Osun State. However 487 administered and returned questionnaires generated the data for the study. A questionnaire titled "Civic Education Students' Curriculum Perception questionnaire. Questionnaire (CESRQ)" was used for data collection. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A dealt with difficulty levels of SSCE Civic Education topics. It contained 23 items on content of the subject and was related on modified four point Likert scale as: Very Difficult (VD) = 4, Difficult (D) = 3, Not Difficult (ND) = 2 and Very Simple (VS) = 1. Section B contained reasons for difficulty levels of Civic Education topics and was on Most Responsible (MR) and Not Responsible (NR). To validate the instrument, copies of the questionnaire was given to experts in Social Studies in the Department of Social Sciences Education, University of Ilorin to ensure face and content validity. Its reliability was established using test-retest technique and a reliability index of 0.83 was obtained. Tables, Percentages, mean and standard deviation were used to answer the three research questions raised for the study.

Findings and Discussion

Research Question 1

What are students perceived difficulty levels of the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination syllabus topics of Civic Education?

To answer the research question 1, results of students on perception of the difficulty levels of the SSCE Civic Education syllabus are shown on the Table below.

Table 1. Students' Perceived Difficulty Levels of the SSCE Syllabus Topics of Civic Education (National Ethics Discipline)

N/S	National Ethics Discipline	N	Difficulty levels VD (%)	D (%)	ND (%)	VS (%)	DECISION
1	Rights and Obligations	487	16 (3.3%)	47 (9.7%)	209 (42.9%)	215 (44.1%)	Predominantly very simple
2	Values	487	2 (0.4%)	14 (2.9%)	214 (43.9%)	257 (52.8%)	Predominantly very simple
3	Citizenship	487	260 (53.4%)	19 (3.9%)	204 (41.9%)	257 (52.8%)	Predominantly very simple
4	Nationalism	487	20 (4.1%)	40 (8.2%)	204 (41.9%)	223 (45.8%)	Predominantly very simple
5	Human rights	487	10 (2.1%)	22 (4.5%)	191 (39.2%)	264 (54.2%)	Predominantly very simple
6	Universal Declaration of Human Rights	487	22 (4.5%)	39 (8.0%)	199 (40.9%)	227 (46.6%)	Predominantly very simple
7	Law and Order	487	18 (3.7%)	29 (6.0%)	198 (40.7%)	242 (49.7%)	Predominantly very simple
8	Responsible Parenthood	487	23 (4.7%)	35 (7.2%)	196 (40.2%)	233 (47.8%)	Predominantly very simple
9	Traffic regulations	487	22 (4.5%)	17 (3.5%)	201 (41.3%)	247 (50.7%)	Predominantly very simple
10	Interpersonal Relationships	487	26 (5.3%)	42 (8.6%)	177 (36.3%)	242 (49.7%)	Predominantly very simple
	Emerging Issues in the Society						
11	Cultism	487	35 (7.2%)	20 (4.1%)	204 (41.9%)	228 (46.8%)	Predominantly very simple
12	Drug and drug abuse	487	26 (5.3%)	20 (4.1%)	173 (35.5%)	268 (55.0%)	Predominantly very simple
13	Human Trafficking	487	34 (7.0%)	17 (3.5%)	187 (38.4%)	249 (51.1%)	Predominantly very simple
14	HIV/AIDS	487	37 (7.6%)	19 (3.9%)	171 (35.1%)	260 (53.4%)	Predominantly very simple
15	Youth Empowerment	487	39 (8.0%)	46 (9.4%)	182 (37.4%)	220 (45.2%)	Predominantly very simple
	Government System and Process						
16	Structure and function of Government	487	27 (5.5%)	47 (9.7%)	170 (34.9%)	243 (49.9%)	Predominantly very simple
17	Democracy	487	17 (3.5%)	24 (4.9%)	213 (43.7%)	233 (47.8%)	Predominantly very simple
18	Constitution	487	18	39	217	213	ND

N/S	National Ethics Discipline	N	Difficulty levels VD (%)	D (%)	ND (%)	VS (%)	DECISION
	features		(3.7%)	(8.0%)	(44.6%)	(43.7%)	
19	Rule of law	487	19 (3.9%)	37 (7.6%)	220 (45.2%)	211 (43.3%)	ND
20	Role of democracy	487	40 (8.2%)	38 (7.8%)	216 (44.4%)	193 (39.6%)	ND
21	Political apathy	487	29 (6.0%)	41 (8.4%)	215 (44.1%)	202 (41.5%)	Predominantly very simple
22	Civic societies	487	28 (5.7%)	31 (6.4%)	230 (47.2%)	198 (40.7%)	Predominantly very simple
23	Public service	487	19 (3.9%)	41 (8.4%)	210 (43.1%)	217 (44.6%)	Predominantly very simple

Table 1 shows the various percentages of difficulty levels. It shows partially difficult and predominantly very simple of difficulty levels. The partly difficult are from 6.6% to 13.0% range while the predominantly very simple are from 44.1% to 52.8% on National Ethics and Discipline. The table also indicates the various percentage of difficulty levels. It shows partly difficult and predominantly very simple of difficulty levels. The partly difficult are from 9.4% to 17.0% range while the predominantly very simple are from 45.2% to 55.0% on Emerging Issues in the society. The table shows the various percentage of difficulty levels. It shows partly difficult and predominantly very simple of difficulty levels. The partly difficult are range from 8.4% to 13.0% range while the predominantly very simple are from 91.6% to 87.0% on Government system and process.

From the table, only 3 topics of the SSCE Civic Education syllabus topics were perceived to be not difficult part of the syllabus, while 20 topics were perceived to be predominantly very simple out of all components of the syllabus.

Research Question 2

What are students perceived difficulty levels of the three major thematic components of the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination syllabus topics of Civic Education?

The responses of the students on difficulty levels of the three major thematic components of the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination syllabus topics of Civic Education are as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Students' Perceived Difficulty Levels of the Three Thematic Components of SSCE Syllabus Topics of Civic Education

Syllabus Themes	Difficulty levels VD (%)	D (%)	ND (%)	VS (%)	Total of Topics	DECISION
National Ethics Discipline	(1.6%)	(1.4%)	(19.3%)	(63.7%)	10	Predominantly very simple
Emerging Issues in the Society	(4.6%)	(14.4%)	(23.0%)	(55.0%)	5	Predominantly very simple
Government System and Process	(0.7%)	(1.3%)	(26.2%)	(63.8%)	8	Predominantly very simple

The results of the thematic students perceived difficulty levels of the three major thematic components of the syllabus topics shown in Table 4 indicates that the National Ethics Discipline and Emerging Issues in the Society are very simple while 3 topics of Government System and Process are not difficult and 20 topics are very simple. On the whole, National Ethics Discipline, Emerging Issues and Government System and Process were perceived to be very simple to understand by the students.

Research Question 3

What are students perceived associated factors with the observed difficulty levels of the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination syllabus topics of Civic Education?

The responses on students perceived associated factors with the observed difficulty levels of the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination syllabus topics of Civic Education were shown on the Table 3.

Table 3. Students' Perceived Associated Factors with the Observed Difficulty Levels of the SSCE Syllabus Topics of Civic Education (Reasons for Difficulty levels)

S/N	Reasons for Difficulty levels	N	M R (%)	N R (%)	Decision	Rank
1	Abstract nature of the topics	487	248 (50.1%)	239 (49.1%)	Responsible	14th
2	Historical nature of the topics	487	241 (49.5%)	246 (50.5%)	Not Responsible	
3	Teachers' treatment of topics	487	213 (43.7%)	274 (56.3%)	Not Responsible	
4	Teacher's inadequate content coverage	487	267 (54.8%)	220 (45.2%)	Responsible	6th
5	Teacher created phobia	487	240 (49.3%)	247 (50.7%)	Not Responsible	
6	Learners' phobia for Civic Education topics	487	255 (52.4%)	232 (47.6%)	Responsible	10th
7	Senior student-related phobia	487	241 (49.5%)	246 (50.5%)	Not Responsible	
8	Senior student-related motivation	487	241 (49.5%)	246 (50.5%)	Not Responsible	
9	Perceived career-irrelevance of Civic Education	487	253 (52.0%)	234 (48.0%)	Responsible	12th
10	Disrupted academic calendar	487	260 (53.4%)	227 (46.6%)	Responsible	8th

S/N	Reasons for Difficulty levels	N	M R (%)	N R (%)	Decision	Rank
11	Irrelevant teachers subject specialization	487	254 (52.2%)	233 (47.8%)	Responsible	11th
12	Wide content	487	271 (55.6%)	216 (44.4%)	Responsible	3rd
13	Rush for syllabus coverage	487	225 (46.2%)	262 (53.8%)	Not Responsible	
14	Extra-mural coaching	487	268 (55.0%)	219 (45.0%)	Responsible	5th
15	Learners' loss of interest	487	243 (49.9%)	244 (50.1%)	Not Responsible	
16	Future career preference	487	266 (54.6%)	221 (45.4%)	Responsible	7th
17	Interest in topics	487	250 (51.3%)	237 (48.7%)	Responsible	13th
18	Insufficient explanation	487	266 (54.6%)	221 (45.4%)	Responsible	7th
19	Lack of textbooks	487	267 (54.8%)	220 (45.2%)	Responsible	6th
20	Inadequate textbook	487	281 (57.7%)	206 (42.3%)	Responsible	1st
21	Large class size	487	257 (52.8%)	230 (47.2%)	Responsible	9th
22	Inadequate preparation for examination	487	269 (55.2%)	218 (44.8%)	Responsible	4th
23	Insufficient topic treatment	487	254 (52.2%)	233 (47.8%)	Responsible	11th
24	Teachers' use of abstract terms/concepts	487	276 (56.7%)	211 (43.3%)	Responsible	2nd
25	Textbook use of Abstract words	487	228 (46.8%)	259 (53.2%)	Not Responsible	

Table 3 showed that eight out of twenty-five perceived associated factors with the observed difficulty levels of the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination syllabus topics of Civic Education were not responsible for the difficulty levels. Seventeen out of the twenty-five perceived associated factors as reasons responsible for the difficulty. This shows that the partly difficult is perceived by the students

Table 4. Students' Perceived Associated Factors with the Observed Difficulty Levels of the SSCE Syllabus Topics of Civic Education (Associated factors)

S/N	Associated factors	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
1	subject-matter related factor	487	4.5606	1.19150	4th
2	teacher-related factor	487	10.6509	2.51524	1st
3	students-related factor	487	7.5791	1.84631	2nd
4	students career-related factor	487	3.0657	.80367	5th
5	school related factor	487	3.0616	.80655	6th
6	instructional material related factor	487	6.1150	1.48349	3rd

Table 4 shows six associated factors in which students' perceived as associated factors with the observed difficulty levels of the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination syllabus topics of Civic Education. Teachers-related factor was ranked first with while the school related factor was ranked 6th as last the associated factor perceived as associated factors with the observed difficulty

levels of the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination syllabus topics of Civic Education.

Discussion

From the results of the data analysed, it is evident that a greater proportion of the SSCE Civic Education syllabus are not difficult, while a smaller proportion is either very difficult or difficult. Also, topics under the National Ethics Discipline and Emerging Issues in the Society were perceived to be very difficult, difficult and not difficult respectively. In addition, 17 reasons were associated with the students with the perceived difficulty levels of 23 topics ranging from topics, inadequate textbook, teachers' use of abstract terms/concepts, among others to abstract nature of the topics of Civic Education.

The findings of the study revealed that there is partly difficulty level of Civic Education indicated by minority of the respondents while the majority showed that the subject is very simple as similarly observed by Okunloye (2004, 2009) that the small proportion of the perceived difficult topic that seems to have accounted for the observed failure strategies consistent with the position of mastery learning on the possibility of set of topics of whatever magnitude in a sequence of other schematized topics to constitute serious problem in learning the holistic component in a given scheme of work (Hyman and Cohen, 1979).

The high ranking of the associated factor of difficulty levels of topics in Civic Education as first and second order associated factors with student's perceived difficult topics also agreed with Awowale (2004) on the observed subject-related and student-related causes of learning difficulties in junior school CRS. This prominence of teacher-related and student-related factors as a cause of the perceived difficulty levels agreed with Fehintola and Falaye (2011) who observed the significance of student's socio-personal factors, including self-efficacy as predictors of academic performance. Although the instructional materials related factor is moderately associated to be influencing the learners' ability of Civic Education topics, the fact that the teacher is most important human resource that determines what, when and how to use other instructional resources implicitly point to the teacher factor as a major determinants of teaching-learning effectiveness.Therefore, the ranking of teacher-related factor as 1stand student- related factor as 2nd order factors do not in any way undermine the potency of the teacher factor in teaching-learning effectiveness and academic achievement. Indeed, as observed by Okonkwo (2002), the subject-teacher is the most important facilitator of learning who is equipped as a problem-solver in learning difficulties through the use of simplified, interest sustaining and learning motivating strategies.

Conclusion

All topics of Civic Education syllabus can be made learnable through effective syllabus coverage using simplified and learning motivating strategies by Civic Education teachers. When these are done, students will be greatly assisted to effectively learn every topic in the syllabus and the likelihood of reversing the prevailing trend of failure rate will be guaranteed.

Implication

All impediments to effective teaching and learning of SSCE Civic Education syllabus topics must be tackled in front to reverse the failure rate in the subject. The components of the syllabus posing problem to the students deserved special attention by teacher through simplified and learner-entre teaching strategies.

Recommendations

In order to address issues raised in this study regarding the difficulty level of the SSCE Civic Education syllabus topics and associated factors, the following measures are suggested:

1. All topics in the syllabus should be made learnable to students by the Civic Education teachers;
2. Teachers of Civic Education should pay special attention to the student's perceived area of difficulties in the syllabus and use teaching strategies that will made them simple to learn; and
3. Appropriate career counselling should be given to the Civic Education students to develop interest in Civic Education and specific Civic Education topics they perceived to be uninteresting.

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