VOL. 13 NO. 8,
AUGUST, 2026
E-ISSN 3026-8893
P-ISSN 3027-1061

African Scholar Publications & Research International
www.africanscholarpub.com

Journal of Education Research and Library Practice (JERLP)

Teachers' Perceptions of Influence of Discussion and Inquiry-Based Teaching Techniques for Improving Upper Basic Social Studies Performance in Keffi, Nasarawa State, Nigeria

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.70382/ajerlp.v13i8.0126

Abstract

This study investigated "Teachers' Perception of the Influence of Teaching Techniques on Academic Performance of Students in Social Studies in Keffi, Nasarawa State". The study has two research questions and two hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population consisted of all Upper Basic II Social Studies teachers in the study area, from which a sample of 39 respondents was drawn using purposive sampling. Data were collected using a structured 20-item questionnaire on a four-point scale with a reliability index of .85. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to answer the research questions, while one-sample t-test was employed to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that teachers perceived that: Inquiry-Based Teaching promoted independent thinking, research skills, and practical application of knowledge and Discussion Teaching fostered collaborative learning, retention, and confidence in expressing ideas. All the Hypotheses tested confirmed that the influence of discussion and inquiry-based teaching techniques in improving upper basic Social Studies performance was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Based on these findings, teachers perceive both inquiry-based and discussion-based teaching techniques as effective for improving the performance of Upper Basic Social Studies students in Keffi, Nasarawa State. Based on the findings, the study recommends that: Social Studies teachers should incorporate inquiry-based activities such as questioning, investigation, problem-solving, and exploration into regular classroom instruction and Teachers should employ structured discussions, debates, brainstorming, and peer-learning activities to enhance students' participation, communication, and critical-thinking skills.

Keywords: Teachers' Perceptions, Inquiry-Based Teaching Techniques, Improving Upper Basic Social Studies Performance, Keffi, Nasarawa State.

Introduction

Education systems are increasingly expected to move beyond the transmission of factual knowledge towards the development of learners who can think critically, solve problems, communicate effectively, collaborate with others, and apply knowledge to authentic situations. This expectation has strengthened interest in instructional approaches that engage learners as active participants in the learning process, rather than passive recipients of teacher-presented information. Apparently, classroom practices indicated that purposeful verbal interaction, structured questioning, collaborative learning, metacognitive engagement, and other forms of active participation can contribute meaningfully to learning outcomes. Therefore, there exists a strong rationale for examining instructional practices that promote active engagement, investigation, communication, and independent thinking in school classrooms.

Within this broader educational context, Social Studies occupies an important position because of its concern with the relationship between individuals and society and with the knowledge, values, attitudes, and skills required for responsible social participation. At the basic education level in Nigeria, Social Studies addresses issues relating to the social environment, culture, values, citizenship, human relationships, and societal problems. The Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) curriculum provides for Social Studies at the junior secondary level and incorporates learner activities alongside teacher activities, including opportunities for students to participate in discussion and use instructional resources (FME, 2018). This curricular orientation is significant because the purposes of Social Studies cannot be achieved adequately through memorisation of isolated facts alone. Learners need opportunities to interpret social realities, examine competing viewpoints, investigate problems, communicate ideas, and apply classroom knowledge to situations within their communities.

The instructional approach adopted by teachers is therefore central to the extent to which the objectives of Social Studies are realised. A subject concerned with social relationships, citizenship, values, community life, contemporary issues, and societal problems requires pedagogical practices that enable learners to engage with ideas and experiences rather than merely receive information. In this regard, learner-centred approaches are particularly relevant because they create opportunities for students to ask questions, investigate issues, exchange perspectives, explain their reasoning, and connect academic content with everyday experiences. The concern is not necessarily to eliminate teacher explanation from the classroom, but to establish an appropriate balance between teacher guidance and active learner participation. This distinction is important because effective learner-centred instruction still requires teachers to provide structure, guidance, questioning, feedback, and appropriate scaffolding.

One instructional approach that is particularly relevant to these requirements is inquiry-based teaching. Inquiry-based teaching engages learners in questioning, investigation, exploration, interpretation of evidence, and the construction of explanations (Uzokife, & Ihekweme, 2023). Rather than presenting knowledge as a finished product, the teacher creates conditions in which learners investigate questions and problems and develop conclusions from evidence and experience. This approach is especially compatible with Social Studies because many of the subject's concepts and issues are open to investigation and interpretation. Students can, for example, investigate causes of social problems, examine community practices, compare perspectives on civic issues, analyse information from different sources, and formulate possible solutions to problems affecting their immediate

environment. Thus, empirical evidence (Afolabi, & Okunloye, 2024; Uzokife, & Ihekweme, 2023), provides support for the relevance of inquiry-oriented in Social Studies education instruction.

Closely related to inquiry-based teaching is the discussion method**,** which provides learners with opportunities to communicate, question, explain, compare, challenge, and refine ideas through interaction with teachers and peers. Discussion is particularly appropriate for Social Studies because many of the issues addressed in the subject involve values, citizenship, culture, social relationships, national development, and contemporary problems for which learners may encounter different viewpoints. Through structured discussion, students can articulate their interpretations, listen to alternative explanations, evaluate arguments, and develop greater confidence in expressing ideas (Nwakile, 2023). Thus, discussion can serve both cognitive and social purposes by supporting conceptual understanding while simultaneously developing communication, participation, tolerance of differing perspectives, and reasoned judgement.

Perception refers to the process through which individuals become aware of, organise, interpret, and assign meaning to information, experiences, or events. It involves how people interpret what they encounter and develop judgments based on their experiences and understanding (American Psychological Association (APA), n.d.). In the context of the present study, teachers' perception refers to the beliefs, interpretations, and professional judgments teachers hold regarding the usefulness and influence of discussion and inquiry-based teaching techniques on Upper Basic Social Studies students' performance. Teachers' perceptions are important because their understanding and evaluation of instructional practices can influence their willingness to adopt and implement such approaches in classroom settings (Schipper et al., 2017). Researchers recognise teachers' perceptions as an important source of evidence for understanding classroom instructional behaviour and the learning environment (Mapulanga, Nshogoza, Ameyaw & Bwalya 2024 and Maulana, & Helms-Lorenz, 2016). Thus, examining teachers' perceptions provides useful insight into how these learner-centred techniques are understood and valued within the Social Studies classroom.

Despite the importance of Social Studies in developing learners' civic competence, critical thinking, social responsibility, and national consciousness, students' academic performance at the Upper Basic level remains a concern. One factor associated with this challenge is the teaching technique adopted by teachers. Although learner-centred approaches such as discussion and inquiry-based teaching are expected to promote active participation, critical thinking, collaboration, and deeper understanding, it is observed that these teacher-centred practices are rarely employed in many classrooms. Thus, this study hinges on the determination to investigate teachers' perceptions of discussion and inquiry-based teaching techniques for improving Upper Basic Social Studies performance in Keffi, Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

The purpose of this study is to:

1. Determine teachers' perception of the influence of Inquiry-Based teaching techniques for improving Upper Basic Social Studies Students' Performance in Keffi, Nasarawa State, Nigeria.
2. Assess teachers' perceptions of the influence of the Discussion Teaching Technique on the academic performance of Upper Basic II students in Social Studies.

The study was guided by the following research questions

1. What are teachers' perceptions of the influence of the Inquiry-Based Teaching Technique improving Upper Basic Social Studies Students' Performance in Keffi Local Government Area, Nasarawa State?

2. What are teachers' perceptions of the influence of the Discussion Teaching Technique improving Upper Basic Social Studies Students' Performance in Keffi Local Government Area, Nasarawa State?

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H_{02}: There is no significant influence of the Inquiry-Based Teaching Technique improving Upper Basic Social Studies Students' Performance in Keffi Local Government Area, Nasarawa State, as perceived by teachers.

H_{03}: There is no significant influence of the Discussion Teaching Technique improving Upper Basic Social Studies Students' Performance in Keffi Local Government Area, Nasarawa State, as perceived by teachers.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine Social Studies teachers' perceptions of discussion and inquiry-based teaching techniques for improving Upper Basic students' academic performance in Keffi Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The population comprised all Social Studies teachers in the 20 public junior secondary schools in the study area during the 2025/2026 academic session, based on records obtained from the Nasarawa State Ministry of Education, from which a sample of 39 Social Studies teachers was selected through purposively and simple random sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled: Teaching Techniques on Students' Academic Performance Questionnaire (TTSAPQ) which has a reliability coefficient of 0.85. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation, with a criterion mean of 2.50 adopted as the decision benchmark. Mean scores of 2.50 and above indicated agreement, whereas scores below 2.50 indicated disagreement. The hypotheses were tested using one-sample *t*-test at the 0.05 level of significance**.** The null hypothesis was rejected when the *p*-value was ≤ 0.05 and retained when the *p*-value was > 0.05.

Results

Research Question One: What are teachers' perceptions of the influence of the Inquiry-Based Teaching Technique improving Upper Basic Social Studies Students' Performance in Keffi Local Government Area, Nasarawa State?

To answer this research question, the data generated was subjected to mean and standard deviation statistics. The summary of the results in presented in table 1.

Table 1: mean and Standard Deviation on influence of the Inquiry-Based Teaching Technique on the academic performance

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Students learn better when they ask questions in class.	3.18	.854	Accepted
2	Inquiry-based learning enhances students' research skills.	3.08	.807	Accepted
3	Students understand Social Studies concepts more deeply through inquiry.	3.15	.844	Accepted
4	Inquiry activities improve students' problem-solving abilities.	3.00	.973	Accepted
5	Students are more engaged when lessons are inquiry-driven.	3.28	.826	Accepted
6	Inquiry-based teaching encourages independent thinking.	3.28	.759	Accepted

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Remark
7	Academic performance improves when students explore concepts themselves.	3.10	.788	Accepted
8	Inquiry techniques develop students' critical thinking in Social Studies.	3.13	.801	Accepted
9	Students can connect Social Studies content to real-life scenarios through inquiry.	3.18	.756	Accepted
10	Inquiry-based teaching reduces teacher-centered instruction.	2.90	.912	Accepted
	Aggregate Mean	**3.13**		

Table 1 shows that all the statements were above the decision mean of 2.50. This indicates that the respondents accepted all the statements as true. The mean scores of the items ranged from 2.90 to 3.28, which are all above the decision benchmark of 2.50. The aggregate mean of the items is 3.13, which is above the decision mean of 2.50. This implies that the response to research question one is in the affirmative. Thus, this means that the respondents perceived that the Inquiry-Based Teaching Technique has a positive influence on the academic performance of Upper Basic students in Social Studies in Keffi Local Government Area, Nasarawa State.

Research Question Two: What are teachers' perceptions of the influence of the Discussion Teaching Technique improving Upper Basic Social Studies Students' Performance in Keffi Local Government Area, Nasarawa State?

To answer this research question, the data generated was subjected to mean and standard deviation statistics. The summary of the results in presented in table 2.

Table 2: mean and Standard Deviation on influence of the Discussion Teaching Technique on the academic performance

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Classroom discussions improve students' understanding of concepts.	3.51	.756	Accepted
2	Discussion techniques enhance students' communication skills.	3.28	.759	Accepted
3	Students retain knowledge better through discussions.	3.21	.864	Accepted
4	Discussions promote critical thinking in Social Studies.	3.10	.882	Accepted
5	Academic performance improves when students participate actively in discussions.	2.97	.903	Accepted
6	Discussions allow students to compare perspectives and ideas.	3.26	.818	Accepted
7	Students develop problem-solving skills through group discussions.	3.33	.927	Accepted
8	Discussion teaching fosters active learning.	3.26	.818	Accepted
9	Students are more confident sharing opinions during discussions.	3.10	.788	Accepted
10	Discussion-based teaching encourages peer learning.	3.05	.916	Accepted
	Aggregate Mean	**3.21**		

Table 2 shows that all the statements were above the decision mean of 2.50. This indicates that the respondents accepted all the statements as true. The mean scores of the items ranged from 2.97 to 3.51, which are all above the decision benchmark of 2.50. The aggregate mean of the items is 3.21, which is

above the decision mean of 2.50. This implies that the response to research question three is in the affirmative. Thus, this means that the respondents perceived that the Discussion Teaching Technique has a positive influence on the academic performance of Upper Basic students in Social Studies in Keffi Local Government Area, Nasarawa State.

H_{01}: There is no significant influence of the Inquiry-Based Teaching Technique in improving Upper Basic Social Studies Students' Performance in Keffi Local Government Area, Nasarawa State? as perceived by teachers.

This null hypothesis was tested using one sample t-test was used and the summary is presented in the table 3.

Table 3 summary of one sample test on influence of the Inquiry-Based Teaching Technique on the academic performance

Variable	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p
Influence of the Inquiry-Based Teaching Technique on the academic performance	39	3.13	.253	15.485	38	.000
Test Mean	39	2.5	.000			

Table 3 shows that t = 15.485, df = 38, p = 0.000 < α = 0.05. This indicates that the probability value (p) is less than the alpha level of significance (p < 0.05). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. It therefore means that there was a significant influence of the Inquiry-Based Teaching Technique in improving Upper Basic Social Studies Students' Performance in Keffi Local Government Area, Nasarawa State.

H_{02}: There is no significant influence of the Discussion Teaching Technique in improving Upper Basic Social Studies Students' Performance in Keffi Local Government Area, Nasarawa State as perceived by teachers.

This null hypothesis was tested using one sample t-test was used and the summary is presented in the table 4.

Table 4 summary of one sample test on influence of the Discussion Teaching Technique on the academic performance

Variable	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p
Influence of the Discussion Teaching Technique on the academic performance	39	3.21	.231	19.132	38	.000
Test Mean	39	2.5	.000			

Table 4 shows that t = 19.132, df = 38, p = 0.000 < α = 0.05. This indicates that the probability value (p) is less than the alpha level of significance (p < 0.05). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, this means that there was a significant influence of the Discussion Teaching Technique in improving Upper Basic Social Studies Students' Performance in Keffi Local Government Area, Nasarawa State as perceived by teachers.

Discussion

The study examined teachers' perceptions of the influence of discussion and inquiry-based teaching techniques for improving the performance of Upper Basic Social Studies students in Keffi, Nasarawa

State, Nigeria. The discussion of findings is presented according to the research questions and corresponding hypotheses. Particular attention is given to the meaning of the findings, possible explanations for the observed results, their relationship with previous empirical evidence, theoretical implications, and implications for classroom practice and educational policy.

Findings from Table 1 revealed that teachers perceived inquiry-based teaching as having a positive influence on the performance of Upper Basic Social Studies students in Keffi, Nasarawa State. The overall response indicates that teachers regarded inquiry-based teaching as useful for developing students' research skills, deepening their understanding of Social Studies concepts, strengthening problem-solving abilities, increasing classroom engagement, encouraging independent thinking, improving academic performance, developing critical-thinking abilities, helping students relate Social Studies content to real-life situations, and reducing excessive teacher-centred instruction. The overall mean response of 3.13 with a standard deviation of 0.253 indicates a consistently favourable perception among the respondents. The corresponding hypothesis further showed that the perceived influence of inquiry-based teaching was statistically significant, ($t(38) = 15.485$, $p < .001$).

The finding suggests that teachers in the study area recognise inquiry-based teaching as an approach capable of repositioning Social Studies learning from passive reception of information to active investigation and knowledge construction. This is particularly important because Social Studies is concerned with human relationships, social institutions, civic responsibilities, contemporary problems, and interactions between individuals and their environments. Such content lends itself naturally to questioning, investigation, interpretation of evidence, discussion of alternative explanations, and application of knowledge to everyday social problems. Consequently, when learners are encouraged to investigate questions rather than merely receive predetermined answers, they are more likely to engage cognitively with the subject matter and develop skills that extend beyond memorisation.

The finding may be explained by the learner-centred nature of inquiry-based teaching. Unlike predominantly expository instruction, inquiry requires learners to participate actively in identifying problems, asking questions, gathering information, examining evidence, drawing conclusions, and communicating their findings. These activities can create opportunities for students to connect new knowledge with their prior experiences and to see Social Studies concepts as relevant to issues within their communities. For Upper Basic learners in particular, the opportunity to investigate familiar social issues may make abstract concepts more concrete and meaningful. In the context of Keffi, teachers can potentially use locally relevant issues such as community development, environmental sanitation, social responsibility, cultural diversity, conflict resolution, citizenship, and responsible use of public resources as starting points for inquiry activities.

The finding may also reflect the potential of inquiry-based teaching to cultivate higher-order cognitive processes. When students are required to formulate questions, compare evidence and justify conclusions, learning extends beyond simple recall to analysis, evaluation and problem solving. This is consistent with contemporary conceptions of effective teaching, which emphasise active engagement and the development of transferable cognitive skills. A recent second-order meta-analysis synthesising ten meta-analyses found that inquiry-based learning had a medium positive effect on learning outcomes, with an overall effect size of $d = 0.62$. Importantly, the positive effects were not confined to a particular educational level or subject area, suggesting that inquiry-based approaches can support learning across diverse instructional contexts. A more recent meta-analysis similarly reported a statistically significant positive effect of inquiry-based learning on student learning outcomes, although the overall effect was relatively modest and varied according to educational level, instructional design and student

engagement. The present finding is consistent with studies by Uzokife and Ihekweme (2023), Afolabi and Okunloye (2024), Ogheneakoke, (2014) and Nwakile, (2023) who found that inquiry- based teaching techniques enhances students' performance.

The finding has important theoretical implications. It lends support to constructivist conceptions of learning, particularly the proposition that learners construct understanding through active engagement with problems, experiences, information and other people rather than simply receiving knowledge from the teacher. It is also compatible with Dewey's experiential view of learning, in which meaningful education involves active participation, reflection and connection between classroom learning and real-life experience (Dewey, 1938). Although Dewey's work is seminal rather than recent, its relevance to inquiry-oriented pedagogy remains evident in contemporary evidence showing that inquiry is most productive when learners are intellectually engaged and when teachers provide appropriate guidance. The finding therefore reinforces the theoretical position that learning becomes more meaningful when students are given opportunities to investigate authentic problems and reflect upon the knowledge they construct.

From a practical perspective, the result suggests that Social Studies teachers should be encouraged to incorporate structured inquiry activities into regular classroom instruction. Rather than limiting inquiry to occasional projects, teachers can formulate problem-based questions from topics in the existing curriculum and guide students through systematic investigation. Teacher education and professional-development programmes should therefore strengthen teachers' competence in questioning techniques, problem formulation, information gathering, evidence evaluation, collaborative investigation and formative assessment. School administrators should also provide appropriate instructional resources and adequate time for inquiry activities.

Findings from Table 2 revealed that teachers perceived discussion-based teaching as having a positive influence on the performance of Upper Basic Social Studies students in Keffi, Nasarawa State. Teachers indicated that discussion-based teaching enhances students' understanding of concepts, communication skills, knowledge retention, critical thinking, academic performance, active participation, ability to compare perspectives and ideas, problem-solving skills, confidence in expressing opinions, active learning and peer learning. The overall mean of 3.21 with a standard deviation of 0.231 demonstrates a strong and relatively consistent positive perception among the respondents. The corresponding hypothesis revealed that the perceived influence of discussion-based teaching was statistically significant, $t(38) = 19.132$, $p < .001$. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected.

The finding implies that teachers perceive classroom discussion as more than a means of allowing students to talk during lessons. Rather, discussion is viewed as a pedagogical process through which learners articulate ideas, listen to alternative viewpoints, question assumptions, explain their reasoning and collaboratively construct understanding. This interpretation is particularly relevant to Social Studies because the subject frequently deals with social issues that may have multiple perspectives rather than one universally accepted response. Issues relating to citizenship, culture, democracy, social justice, environmental challenges, national integration and community development can therefore provide opportunities for learners to examine competing viewpoints and develop reasoned positions.

One probable explanation for the finding is the interactive nature of discussion-based teaching. When students are required to explain their ideas publicly, they have opportunities to reorganise their thoughts and identify gaps in their understanding. Similarly, listening to classmates exposes learners to perspectives that may differ from their own. The resulting exchange can encourage clarification, comparison, evaluation and synthesis of ideas. Discussion may therefore contribute to deeper

conceptual understanding because students are not merely exposed to information; they are required to process, explain and defend it.

The finding may also be associated with the social dimension of learning. Learning occurs within a social environment in which teachers and students interact, communicate and negotiate meaning. This position is consistent with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which views interaction and communication as important mechanisms through which learners develop higher mental processes (Vygotsky, 1978). From this perspective, well-structured classroom discussion can provide a social context within which students learn from teachers and peers while progressively developing their ability to reason independently. This finding lends credence to the study by Nwakile (2023) who concluded that discussion method ranked strongly in improving students' academic achievement and interest, while lecture method ranked last. This result is highly consistent with the present finding because both studies focus on Social Studies at the Upper Basic level.

The theoretical implication of this finding is particularly strong for sociocultural and social constructivist perspectives. The result supports the proposition that knowledge development is facilitated by interaction, communication and collaborative meaning-making. Discussion provides a platform through which learners can move from tentative understanding to more elaborated forms of reasoning by receiving feedback, encountering alternative explanations and articulating their own interpretations. In this respect, discussion-based teaching extends the idea of learner-centred instruction by recognising that active learning is not necessarily an individual process; it can be collectively constructed through purposeful interaction.

The result also has implications for democratic education, an important dimension of Social Studies. A classroom in which students are encouraged to express opinions, listen respectfully to opposing views and justify their positions can serve as a microcosm of democratic participation. Discussion therefore has significance beyond examination performance. It can potentially contribute to the development of communication, tolerance, respect for diversity, reasoned judgement and responsible participation in society. These qualities correspond closely with the broader objectives of Social Studies education in Nigeria.

Practically, Social Studies teachers should incorporate debates, small-group discussions, think-pair-share activities, brainstorming, panel discussions, guided questioning and peer explanation into appropriate lessons. Teachers should deliberately formulate open-ended questions that require students to explain, compare, justify and evaluate rather than merely recall information. They should also establish participation norms that encourage respectful listening and prevent a small number of outspoken students from dominating the discussion. Formative assessment can be integrated into discussion activities to enable teachers to identify misconceptions and provide immediate feedback.

Conclusion

The study concludes that teachers perceive both inquiry-based and discussion-based teaching techniques as effective for improving the performance of Upper Basic Social Studies students in Keffi, Nasarawa State. Inquiry-based teaching was perceived to promote investigation, critical thinking, problem-solving, independent learning, and the application of Social Studies knowledge to real-life situations, while discussion-based teaching was perceived to enhance conceptual understanding, communication, participation, critical thinking, and collaborative learning. The statistically significant findings further indicate strong teacher perceptions of the educational value of both techniques. Overall,

the findings underscore the importance of moving beyond predominantly teacher-centred instruction towards interactive and learner-centred approaches in Upper Basic Social Studies classrooms.

Recommendations

teachers perceive both inquiry-based and discussion-based teaching techniques as effective for improving the performance of Upper Basic Social Studies students in Keffi, Nasarawa State

Based on the findings, the study recommends that: Social Studies teachers should incorporate inquiry-based activities such as questioning, investigation, problem-solving, and exploration into regular classroom instruction and Teachers should employ structured discussions, debates, brainstorming, and peer-learning activities to enhance students' participation, communication, and critical-thinking skills.

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