

# Hermeneutic Perspective on the Performance of Pupils in Social Studies at Junior Secondary School in Masaiti district

Setwin Mutau Mufalo<sup>1\*</sup>, Gistered Muleya<sup>2</sup>, Francis Simui<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Mishikishi Secondary School, Masaiti, Zambia*

<sup>2,3</sup>*Institute of Distance Education, University of Zambia, Lusaka, Zambia*

*\*Corresponding Author*

## **Abstract:**

**Purpose:** Hermeneutic perspective on the performance of pupils in Social Studies at junior secondary school in Masaiti District, Zambia.

**Methodology:** The study was qualitative in nature where hermeneutic phenomenological approach was applied in the study. The participants for the entire study were 12 who were chosen through homogenous selective sampling. The production of data was through semi structured interviews, semi structured questionnaires, observation schedules and document analysis. Consequently, the produced data was thematically analysed.

**Findings:** The study revealed that there was poor academic performance of pupils in Social Studies at junior secondary school in Masaiti district. The experienced poor performance was attributed to a number of challenges which emerged as themes such as integration of the subject, paucity of instructional time, lack of qualified teachers specifically trained in Social Studies, a dearth of teaching/learning materials, bulkiness of the content, laziness of learners, inadequate parental encouragement as well as inadequate parental supervision.

**Keywords:** Academic Performance, Junior Secondary School, Social Studies, Masaiti

## I. INTRODUCTION

In 2013, Social Studies was introduced at Junior Secondary School across the country. It was for this reason that the current study was conducted in order to explore the performance of pupils in Social Studies at junior secondary school in Masaiti district on the Copperbelt province of Zambia.

## II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

There are many factors which contribute to good or poor performance of learners in a subject. Hollstein (2018) carried out a study in South Korea where it was found that Social Studies was poorly funded as compared to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects. It meant that some important programmes which required funding to support study tours could not take off. Further, the study revealed that Social Studies at junior secondary school was taught by teachers who were specialised in other study areas such as History, Geography or general Social Studies.

Therefore, these revelations indicate that social studies as a subject faced challenges which could have affected smooth delivery of the subject to the learners.

A study that was carried out by Al-Maamari, Al-Nofli and Al-Gharibi (2014) to investigate the state of Social Studies in Basic Education in Oman revealed that there was inadequate instructional time given to the subject (three to four class periods per week). This was a challenge to teachers because of less time allocated compared to huge subject content due to combination of a variety of disciplines. Additionally, most teachers who taught the subject were not specifically trained in Social Studies but in various fields such as geography, history, general Social Studies and other specialisations.

Mensah (2019) conducted a study to examine students' attitude towards learning of Social Studies and their performance in Accra Metropolitan Assembly in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. The students performed on average in Social Studies despite having positive attitudes towards the subject. The factors which contributed to average performance were "teachers not showing interest in teaching, controversial issues, teachers' inability to give needed assistance to students, teachers' inability to use different teaching methods in Social Studies classes, inadequate teaching and learning materials and inability of Social Studies teachers to employ resource persons in times of difficulty" (Mensah, 2020: 73; Mensah, 2019: iii). Therefore, it was recommended that Ghana Education Service should recruit professional teachers to teach Social Studies in schools. In addition, it was recommended that Colleges of Education should recruit competent lecturers with in-depth knowledge on the subject and make the subject as practical as possible. The study also recommended that during Social Studies lessons, teachers should create lessons that were interesting and motivating to the learners. Furthermore, it was recommended that teachers of Social Studies needed to employ different teaching methods among many other approaches.

Furthermore, the findings of Mensah (2020) revealed that Social Studies text books in Ghana were substandard because they were written by people with superficial knowledge on the subject. It was further noted that most of the students

perceived Social Studies as a less difficult subject as compared to other subjects. This perception affected the academic performance of learners (Mensah, 2020; Mensah, 2019). Schug, Todd and Beery (1982 in Mensah 2019) supported these findings and noted that negative attitude towards Social Studies did affect the pupil performance in the subject. Reinforcing the above finding, the research conducted in San Francisco Public School revealed that Social Studies was ranked the least in importance and that it was rather confusing with little relationship to their future lives (Fernandez, Massey and Dombush 1976 in Mensah 2019). The lack of content knowledge in Social Studies by teachers affected pupils' performance (Bordoh, Eshun, Kofie, Bassaw and Kwarteng, 2015). In light of these revelations, the research conducted by the Centre for Research into Improving the Quality of Primary Education in Ghana (CRIQPEG) at the University of Cape Coast noted that despite massive efforts in the education reforms, pupils' achievement had not made any significant gains and was in fact embarrassingly poor (Akyeampong 2003 in Quashigah, Dake, Bekoe, Eshun and Bordoh, 2014).

Furthermore, the study done by Eshun, Zuure, Brew and Bordoh (2019) assessed the implications of graduate teachers' knowledge base of profile dimensions in the senior high schools in Ghana and found that most Social Studies teachers did not have in-depth knowledge about the profile dimensions in the subject. The other revelation was that most of the participants did not possess the knowledge regarding profile dimensions except for the few who learnt the subject at the University. Furthermore, the participants' areas of subject specialisation also revealed that, out of the sampled number from the 12 participants, 3 (25.0%) were trained in Social Studies while 9 (75.0%) were not trained in Social Studies. Out of the 9 untrained participants who taught the subject, 4 (33.3%) were specialised in Political Science, 1 (8.3%) in Sociology, 1 (8.3%) in International Relations and Development Studies, 2 (16.7%) in Geography and 1 (8.3%) in Psychology. Notably, the number of graduate teachers who were not trained in Social Studies yet teaching the subject outnumbered those trained in the subject. Similarly, the study by Kanda and Kankam (2015) noted that most teachers who taught Social Studies in basics schools in Ghana were not trained in Social studies. The status quo might have contributed to ineffective teaching of the subject resulting in poor academic performance of learners in the subject (Eshun et al., 2019). In this regard therefore, "these findings are supported by the view that individuals who are well prepared in content knowledge can move into the classroom with minimal training and be effective teachers. On the same wavelength, there is this assertion that without a deep understanding of subject matter/content, teachers would be unable to generate accurate explanations or responses to students' questions. Subject matter knowledge is critical to good teaching; teachers must be able to identify learner misconceptions and without a strong knowledge base, identifying and addressing learner misconceptions would not

be possible" (Eshun et al., 2019: 218). It was recommended that Social Studies teachers should study the profile dimensions of the subject to enable them employ best approaches when teaching the subject.

Another study which was conducted in Nigeria by Nwaubani, Otoh-Offong, Usulor and Okeke (2016) established that there were limited teaching and learning materials in Social Studies at junior secondary school in Nigeria. Nwaubani et al. (2016) aptly put it, effective teaching and learning of any school subject depends on the availability and utilization of diverse material resources. Similarly, the study by Mufalo, Mulubale, Muleya and Simui (2021) revealed among others that limited teaching and learning materials and non-availability of qualified Social Studies teachers in schools hindered the provision of quality education at junior secondary school. Additionally, the study that was conducted to analyse the implementation of the junior secondary school Social Studies curriculum revealed that there was poor performance of learners in Social Studies at junior secondary school level compared to other subjects (Moobola and Mulenga, 2020). As such, Social Studies result in most of the schools from 2016 to 2019 were below average and the pass rate ranged from 31% to 41% and most of the scores were skewed towards grades 3 and 4 respectively. The study further noted that the poor performance was attributed to lack of qualified Social Studies teachers. In addition, it was found that the time allotted to the subject was also inadequate. Therefore, it was recommended that "the Ministry of General Education through the Curriculum Development Centre should consider allocating more time to the Social Studies, expedite the training and recruitment of Social Studies teachers and encourage Continuous Professional Development (CPD) meetings both at district and school levels for the purpose of capacity building" (Moobola and Mulenga, 2020: 13-14).

In 2016, the Examinations Council of Zambia carried out subject performance analysis in the national examinations. It was observed that the country had recorded poor academic performance of learners in Social Studies and the pass rate was 39.65% which was below the standardised pass mark of 40% at junior secondary school level (ECZ, 2017). This poor performance depicted negative acceleration in terms of the rationale of the subject as well as education at large. It was recommended that the Ministry of General Education then should supply additional learning and teaching materials and employ teachers in these new subjects in order to foster deep learning amongst the candidates (ECZ, 2017). Similarly, the 2019 grade 9 external and General Certificate of Education (G.C.E) examination results summary also indicated high failure rate in Social Studies second from Mathematics (ECZ, 2019). Despite the Ministry of Education's claims that teachers were qualified, it would appear that the integration of the three subjects into social studies was not yielding the desired results (Moobola and Mulenga, 2020).

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research Design

It was a qualitative study where hermeneutic phenomenological model was applied. Hermeneutic phenomenology model was employed because it is “concerned with human experience as it is lived” (Simui, Kasonde-Ngandu and Nyaruwata, 2017b: 6). Therefore, the main aim of this approach was to elucidate lived meanings (Dangal, 2020). This is because “it is assumed that meaning is embedded in people’s experiences” (Simui, Chibale and Namangala, 2017a: 304). In other words, meaning is within the life-worlds of the people.

#### 3.2 Study Site

The study was carried out in Masaiti district on the Copperbelt province of Zambia.

#### 3.3 Target Population

Ministry of Education district officials, school administrators, Heads of Department, Heads of Section-Civic Education and teachers of Civic Education were the target population for the study.

#### 3.4 Sample Size

The study had twelve (12) participants who were determined at a point of data saturation during data generation. In other words, informational redundancy emanating from the emerging of the same or repeated information from key actors or key insiders during the process of data generation led to data saturation. Lincoln and Guba (1985) agree with this idea and posited that sample size should be guided by the criterion of informational redundancy. Therefore, data saturation is the degree to which new data repeat what was expressed in previous data during data gathering (Saunders, Sim, Kingstone, Baker, Waterfield, Bartlam, Burroughs and Jinks, 2017). Suffice to state that saturation is the most widely used principle for determining sample size in qualitative research (Kindsiko and Poltimae, 2019; Vasileiou, Barnett, Thorpe and Young, 2018). This is an essential tool in determining qualitative samples (Fusch and Ness, 2015) as long as there is information power. Consistent with this, the more usable data is gathered from each key insider, the smaller the number of key actors is required for the study (Morse, 2000). Reinforcing this statement, the proponents of this term ‘information power’ Malterud, Siersma and Guassora (2016) contend that the more information power is provided by the sample, the fewer the sample size is needed (Vasileiou et al., 2018; Malterud et al. (2016). Therefore, what matters is not the number of cases but what you do with them is what counts (Emmel, 2013). However, we should bear in mind that saturation should be operationalised in line with research questions or certain factors in terms of methodology and epistemology underpinning the study (Sim, Saunders, Waterfield and Kingstone, 2018; Saunders et al., 2017;

Malterud et al., 2016). In view of the above, no formula was used to determine the sample size for the study.

#### 3.5 Sampling Procedure

Non-probability sampling method was used where homogenous selective sampling technique was employed in selecting all the study participants. This sampling procedure was chosen because the selected sample was perceived to be endowed with the needed data. All participants had similar characteristics since they were drawn from the same category.

#### 3.6 Research Instruments

Semi structured interview guides, semi structured questionnaires and observation guides were the instruments that guided the process of data production.

#### 3.7 Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to commencement of data generation process, permission was obtained from the Provincial Education Officer. Therefore, semi-structure interviews, semi-structure questionnaires and observation schedules were used to gather data from participants. In addition, data from interviews was recorded using a diary and a voice recorder.

#### 3.8 Data Analysis

The data that was generated from participants was thematically analysed. For anonymity and confidentiality purposes, participants were given pseudonyms. Therefore, discussions of the findings were done using existential dimensions (corporeality, spatiality, temporality and relationality) as espoused by van Manen (1990/1997 in Guimond-Plourde, 2009).

#### 3.9 Ethical Considerations

The research proposal was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Zambia prior to data production process. Permission to conduct a study was granted by the Provincial Education Officer, Copperbelt province whereas permission from participants was sought through signing of consent letters. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants was also put into consideration hence, each key insider was allocated a pseudonym.

### IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study revealed that the performance of pupils in Social Studies at junior secondary school leaving examination and during school-based assessments [*spatiality*] was not good. This revelation is in agreement with the finding of Mensah (2019) who established that the academic performance of students in Accra Metropolitan Assembly in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana was not good. In the same vein, Moobola and Mulenga (2020) revealed that the performance of pupils in Social Studies at junior secondary school in Chingola district on the Copperbelt province of Zambia was poor. The Examinations Council of Zambia recorded similar results after conducting subject performance analysis in 2016 where it was

established that pupils performed very poor in Social Studies at junior secondary school level across the country with the pass rate of 39.65% which was even below the standardised pass mark of 40% (ECZ, 2017). This position corresponds well with the 2019 grade 9 external examination results summary conducted by Examinations Council of Zambia which revealed that Social Studies had the second largest proportion of candidates who failed (74.46%) in the national examinations (ECZ, 2019). Similarly, the study done by Mufalo et al. (2021) found that there was poor performance of pupils in Social Studies at junior secondary school in Masaiti district on the Copperbelt province of Zambia.

Participants held the view [*corporeality*] that there were many factors which contributed to poor academic performance of learners in social studies [*spatiality*]. One of them was the integration of the three subjects (History, Geography and Civic Education) which culminated into Social Studies. In this regard therefore, poor academic performance was the emerging theme which became prominent among the submissions of participants during the study. For example, *Nja* said the following:

*...There is poor performance because of the integration. The bulkiness of the subject has also led to this [poor performance] (Nja.p6, 03.09.2021).*

The sentiments echoed by *Nja* were also re-echoed by *Tau* and *Lii* who had this to say:

*'The performance of pupils is discouraging because of the integration of Civic Education into Social Studies. The subject has become bulky which leads to poor performance' (Tau.p10, 28.10.2021).*

*The performance is not good because of the integration. It [the integration] has brought a lot of confusion among learners that is why there is poor performance of pupils' countrywide [spatiality]. In 2019, [temporality] the pass rate in Social Studies at this school [spatiality] was 35%. This was because of the integration and there are no teachers who are specifically trained in Social Studies at the moment [temporality] (Lii.p5, 01.09.2021).*

In addition, *Kulu* a primary school teacher who holds a primary school teacher's certificate but teaches Civic Education component in Social Studies at junior secondary school [*spatiality*] observed the following on the integrated subject:

*'It creates work overload to both the learners and teachers who offer this subject because all the subjects contents involves a lot of note taking and requires a learner to memorise' (Kulu.p8, 27.10.2021).*

Therefore, the inference from the submissions of *Kulu* and other participants is that they were not in support of the integration because they felt [*corporeality*] that it affected

teachers' effective delivery of the subject and learner performance in schools [*spatiality*] as well as teacher-parent relationships in the community [*relationality*].

Further, bulkiness of the subject was another theme that emerged during the study as highlighted in the above verbatim. Reports from participants on the bulkiness of the subject indicated that this aspect had also contributed to poor performance of learners the district [*spatiality*] was experiencing in the subject for a couple of years now [*temporality*]. This was because most of the teachers who taught Social Studies in general were not able to complete the Social Studies syllabus for the junior secondary school [*spatiality*]. *Tou* who is a senior teacher at a certain primary school [*spatiality*] holding a bachelor's degree in Psychology but teaches Civic Education component in Social Studies reported the following on how the bulkiness of the subject affected learner performance:

*'For the learners aaah!... Civic Education is quite wide you know. So it should be trimmed to a level where a learner would be comfortable to grasp the content of this Civic Education. It's too bulky in short. Otherwise, the performance will not improve if the current situation continues' (Tou.p11, 04.11.2021).*

In addition, participants revealed that shortage of qualified teachers specifically trained in Social Studies affected the provision of quality education and pupil performance. At the time [*temporality*] the study was conducted, it was found that there were no teachers specifically trained in Social Studies recruited since the introduction of the subject at junior secondary school across the country [*spatiality*] in 2014 [*temporality*]. Therefore, the subject was found to be taught by teachers with different specialisation such as Geography, History, Religious Studies, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Business Studies, Psychology, Special Education and Civic Education among others. In the same line, the study done by Kanda and Kankam (2015) found that Social Studies was taught by teachers not trained in the subject. The study by Hollstein (2018) further revealed that Social Studies at junior secondary school in South Korea [*spatiality*] was taught by teachers who were specialised in subjects such as History, Geography or general Social Studies. Similar results were recorded by Moobola and Mulenga (2020) who established that Social Studies at junior secondary school in Chingola district [*spatiality*] was taught by teachers who were specialised in History, Geography and Civic Education. Further, they pointed out that lack of qualified Social Studies teachers contributed to poor academic performance of learners in the subject in schools [*spatiality*]. This was because there was ineffective teaching which resulted in poor academic performance of learners in the subject (Eshun et al., 2019). Consequently, when teachers have limited content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge, it affects both subject delivery and learner performance (Mufalo, 2021). This statement is also supported by that of

Bordoh et al. (2015) who posited that lack of content knowledge in Social Studies by teachers affected pupils' performance.

Participants also pointed out that a dearth of teaching and learning materials such as quality textbooks and syllabi in the subject contributed to poor performance of learners as well. This revelation is in tandem with that of Mwanza and Silukuni (2020) who established that inadequate stocks of educational materials negatively affected the provision of quality education hence, resulting into poor academic performance of learners in Social Studies in schools [*spatiality*]. Similarly, the study by Mensah (2020; 2019) pointed out that substandard textbooks and inadequate teaching/learning materials contributed to average performance of learners in Social Studies in Ghana [*spatiality*]. Further, the study that was conducted in Nigeria by Nwaubani et al. (2016) found that there were limited teaching/learning materials in Social Studies at junior secondary school [*spatiality*]. This could have had a serious impact on the teaching of the subject. This is because for any subject to be taught effectively and achieve the set specific outcomes there must be availability of instructional materials. Corroborating this assertion Nwaubani et al. (2016) aptly put it, effective teaching and learning of any school [*spatiality*] subject depends on the availability and utilization of diverse material resources. In the same vein the study by Mufalo et al. (2021) revealed that limited teaching and learning affected the provision of quality education and learner performance at junior secondary school [*spatiality*].

When asked about their opinion on the way forward with regard to the current integration of the subject, most of the participants held the view [*corporeality*] that the integration was not good. They suggested that the subject could still be taught as a stand-alone unlike the way it has been structured or taught independently as the case maybe [*temporality*] at senior secondary school level across the country [*spatiality*]. They added that the integration was a challenge because everyone was blamed whenever pupils failed the examinations as it was not easy to identify underperforming teachers since Social Studies in some schools [*spatiality*] was taught by three teachers with different subject specialisations. Therefore, this situation brought tension among teachers [*relationality*].

Here is what *Ngo* said on the integration:

*'...For me I would say [corporeality] this integration is not good because it might not bring out the desired results in as far as Civic Education competences are concerned. The subject should be separated because integrating them might reduce the desired impact (Ngo.p2, 04.08.2021).*

In other words, one gets the sense that those who have advocated this integration might have missed the point that Civic Education supports and provides some emphasis on praxis, interaction with tools, objects, experiences, reflections, assumptions among many others to gaining great

understanding through hands-on knowledge on civic issues and actions (Mupeta, Muleya, Kanyamuna and Simui, 2020; Mupeta and Muleya, 2019; Mwanangombe, Mundende, Muzata, Muleya, Kanyamuna and Simui, 2020; Muleya, Simui, Mundende, Kakana, Mwewa and Namangala, 2019). This state of the subject would not further integrate as most of the content would not be adequately covered. This then justifies the above challenges as pointed out by the participants in the study.

Paucity of instructional time [*temporality*] was another theme that emerged during the study. Participants stated that Social Studies was allotted 6 periods per week [*temporality*]. They held the view [*corporeality*] that limited contact time [*temporality*] affected teachers' effective delivery as most teachers were not able to finish the Social Studies syllabus within the stipulated 2years period [*temporality*] at junior secondary school [*spatiality*]. This aspect in turn affected the academic performance of learners. Further, it was revealed that poor performance in the subject which schools were recording also created tension between teachers, school authorities and the community [*relationality*] at large. Corroborating the above study finding, a study by Al-Maamari et al. (2014) revealed that Social Studies in Oman was allocated 3 to 4 periods per week which was inadequate instructional time [*temporality*].

Other themes that emerged from the participants were laziness of learners, inadequate parental supervision and inadequate parental encouragement and strictness. They stated that the poor performance of learners in schools [*spatiality*] was also attributed to laziness on the part of the learners because they did not have time [*temporality*] to study coupled with inadequate parental supervision as well as inadequate parental encouragement and strictness towards their children [*relationality*].

## V. CONCLUSION

The study findings indicated that there was poor academic performance of learners in Social Studies in the district. The poor academic performance was attributed to a number of factors not limited to the integration of the subject, paucity of instructional time, lack of qualified teachers of Social Studies, a dearth of teaching and learning materials, bulkiness of the subject content, laziness of learners, inadequate parental encouragement as well as inadequate parental supervision. Despite the above highlighted challenges, suffice to state that education is an indispensable tool not only for personal transformation but also for societal change and sustainable development (Rogayan and Villanueva, 2019).

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following were the study recommendations:

1. Ministry of Education should procure adequate teaching and learning materials of good quality
2. Ministry of Education should employ qualified teachers of Social Studies.

3. Ministry of Education should separate Social Studies into independent subjects. This was because the content of each component was bulky which made it difficult for most of the teachers to complete the syllabus within the specified period hence, affecting the performance of learners too.
4. Parents should monitor activities of their children, supervise and encourage them to work extra hard towards their academic work.

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