

Skills and Usage of the Inquiry-Based Technique to Achieve the Learning Philosophy of the Social Studies Curriculum: Perspective of Junior High School Social Studies Teachers in Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese District.

Clarke Ebow Yalley¹, Adwoa Dufie Adjei¹ and Ernest Sarpong Akore²

¹Department of Social Studies Education, University of Education, Winneba

²Abetifi Presbyterian College of Education, Abetifi, Ghana

Corresponding author: Clarke Ebow Yalley

Email: ceyalley@uew.edu.gh

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6462-1194>

Abstract

Inquiry-based learning is a teaching method that encourages students to become active learners through asking questions, investigating and analyzing information, and drawing conclusions. As a result, Social Studies instruction has moved from the teacher-centred method to a learner-centred method to encourage students to construct their own knowledge and ideas about contemporary persistent problems of the society. This shift in teaching method demands teaching technique that creates the enabling classroom environment that enhances the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills among learners. To effectively utilize the inquiry-based technique in the teaching of Social Studies, teachers must first develop their own skills in questioning, researching and analyzing data to guide learners question the truth and authenticate the accuracy, trustworthiness, validity and reliability of the information in the course of lesson delivery. The actualization of the relevance of the inquiry-based is dependent on the skills and competence of Social Studies teachers. It is therefore imperative to examine from the perspective of Junior High School Social Studies teachers; how the inquiry-based technique is used to facilitate students' acquisition of core competencies. The descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. Also, the census survey and convenience sampling were employed at different stages of the study. The study's findings revealed the existence of knowledge and practical gaps in possession of inquiry-based skills and usage among Social Studies teachers in the Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese District of Ghana. Based on the study findings, it is recommended that Junior High Schools Social Studies teachers undergo a three-week workshop to bridge the identified theoretical and practical gap. For meaningful learning to thrive, Social Studies teachers can facilitate discussions and guide students towards making connections between different information envisaged to ignite critical thinking, innovativeness, collaboration, communication, problem-solving, leadership traits, and curiosity among students

Keywords: *Social Studies Teachers, Inquiry-Based Technique, Inquiry skills, Social Inquiry Model, Social Constructivism and Environmental Dimension*

Introduction

The scope Social Studies, being discipline-based, dimension-based and concern-based, stresses the subject's content into eternity (Brophy, Alleman, & Halvorsen, 2016). Again, the eternal nature of the Social Studies scope makes it difficult or practically impossible for the Social Studies teachers to present, transmit or impart all the necessary values, attitudes, information, skills and competencies to students in the course of teaching and learning (Evans, 2004). It is imperative that the scope of Social Studies presents well-grounded and broadened content needed for the holistic development of students. To develop the didactic, heuristic and philatelic aspects of students, the acquisition of competencies, values, attitudes, knowledge, and dispositions that enable learners to become a creative, productive, and innovative member of society willing and capable of contributing to society's socio-economic, politico-educational, and religious transformation. In this regard, students' need to develop reflective, civic competence and participatory competencies to fit into the ever-changing world and contribute their quota to the survival of the Ghanaian society (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2019). Social Studies will, therefore, provides avenues for learners to interact with others and interrogate issues to construct new knowledge and ideas and describe, analyze and evaluate problems that are critical to the survival of the human race. Through effective teaching and learning of Social Studies, learners will acquire:

- i. critical thinking and problem-solving skills to be able to compare and contrast, analyze, evaluate and apply geographical knowledge with little or no supervision
- ii. creative thinking skills to be able to reconstruct important information confidently
- iii. digital literacy skills to be able to use ICT tools and resources efficiently for investigations and project work
- iv. practical communication skills to be able to share information at various levels of interaction
- v. values to live as global citizens capable of learning and understanding other peoples and cultures of the world (NaCCA, 2019).

Social Studies teachers must use the inquiry-based teaching method to direct students on how individuals came to know, interpret, act on knowledge possessed, construct new knowledge, and engage in critical thinking to solve personal and societal problems. The Social Studies teacher must establish the question and problem themes, and allow students to draw on their existing knowledge to respond. It makes students explore the evidence, interrogate texts, interact with information from various sources, reflect, discuss, critique, analyze, conceptualize, synthesize, create and receive feedback, and communicate and share their inquiry. The brainstorming, discussion, debate, problem-solving, and discovery teaching techniques encourage students to identify problems and use the requisite process to address such issues. The underpinning philosophy of the inquiry-based method is process-oriented rather than content-oriented. The process-oriented nature enables students to question the truth, authenticate the accuracy, trustworthiness, validity and reliability of the information in the course of teaching and learning (Shanmugavelu, et al, 2020). Furthermore, the inquiry-based approach stimulates students' previous knowledge, experiences, evidences, and argument in the classroom to facilitate critical thinking, communication, collaboration, problem-solving, and leadership trait during the instructional period.

Gauging from the above, the inquiry-based teaching approach demands that students' becomes the focal point of teaching and learning. Cumulatively, the inquiry-based teaching requires Social Studies teachers to acquire and exhibit specific fundamental skills and competencies needed to use the inquiry-based method of instruction effectively. It is challenging to change teachers' behaviour, perception, and attitude from one pedagogical approach to another (Schreurs & Al-Hunedi, 2011). Most teachers feel reluctant to change and consistently use the old teaching method without recourse to contemporary skills and competencies (Saye & Brush, 2004; Martin, 2016; Brush & Saye, 2005; Harmon, 2006). The researchers' experience, exposure and interaction with other Social Studies teachers presuppose that their inability to experience inquiry-based teaching during their pre-tertiary or tertiary days affects their teaching pattern. These Social Studies teachers perceive teaching as an apprenticeship enterprise. Again, limited training on inquiry-based techniques and instruction by apprenticeship makes Social Studies teachers ineffective in using the inquiry-based method (Brush & Saye, 2005). In addition, most of the Social Studies teachers at the Junior High School level did not study Social Studies as either a major or minor subject area at the training college or the university level, thereby making them out-of-field teachers in the subject area. The prevalence of out-of-field teachers and non-professional teaching of Social Studies is unacceptably high at the pre-tertiary level in Ghana and, as a result, hinders the effective teaching and learning of the subject with reference to achieving intended goals and objectives (Dee & Cohodes, 2008; Yalley, 2017).

A logic of preposition, therefore, highlights the dominating lecture technique (Reisman, 2012), textbook focused (Jibililu, 2021), and learning limited to the walls of the classroom as a plague to Social Studies instruction (Iyamu & Otote, 2006; Johnson, 2007; Yilmaz, 2008). The teacher-centred approach to teaching and learning conceptualizes students' knowledge in a water-tight compartment that kills students' creativity, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, innovativeness, and problem-solving abilities. It therefore seems to suggest limited studies exist to broaden the usage of the inquiry-based method among Social Studies teachers (van Hover & Hicks, 2017; Grant et al., 2017; Nagel, 2008).

Again, the lack of empirical studies on the skills needed for effective and efficient use of the inquiry-based technique have left educators without clear direction and understanding of what knowledge and practices should be utilize in creating and managing a socially complex learning environment (Martin, 2004). It is from this perspective that, Wiens, Calkins, Yoder and Hightower (2021) and Krathwohl (2002) attest that Social Studies teachers hinder and curtail deeper and meaningful learning of students by continuously using teacher-centred instructional techniques. This practice of Social Studies teachers makes students passive participants, encourages memorization of facts, and curtails higher order thinking. Alternatively, the subject 'Social Studies needs to be taught using a student-centred approach and techniques that will allow learners become active participants in order to construct their own knowledge, and meaning. As students learn through experience and inferences, they develop interest, critical thinking, imaginative abilities and problem-solving skills.

It appears the adaptation of the inquiry-based instruction will create the atmosphere for students to learn through experience, make inferences and experience the processes of knowledge creation intended to shift Social Studies instruction from transmission of facts to a self-directed learning (Spronken-Smith, 2012). Using the inquiry-based technique as an innovative instructional pedagogue can only be effectively implemented if JHS Social Studies teachers

possess the appropriate skills and competency in usage during teaching and learning process. Given the dynamics of contextual usage of the inquiry-based technique (Diegnan, 2009), it is imperative to examine from the perspective of Junior High School Social Studies teachers the needed skills to implement inquiry-based learning method in teaching Social Studies and its effects on students' learning outcomes.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- i. What inquiry-based skills do Junior High Schools Social Studies teachers possess in the teaching and learning of Social Studies?
- ii. How do Junior High Schools Social Studies teachers use the inquiry-based technique to ensure the development of core competencies among students?

The study's findings will serve as a wake-up call to Social Studies teachers to use the inquiry-based instructional technique to create a supportive classroom environment that fosters curiosity, critical thinking, collaboration, creativity and problem-solving among students. Furthermore, the study's findings will allow Social Studies teachers to effectively use the inquiry-based technique to guide students' construct their own knowledge, skills, and competencies to solve personal and societal problems. The ultimate contribution of this study will enable Ministry of Education, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA) and the Ghana Education Service (GES) emphasize the use of the inquiry-based technique in teaching Social Studies to enable teachers create a learner-centred classrooms to intensify students' participation during instruction. Furthermore, the study will provide insight into the use of inquiry-based methods in improving students learning outcomes in Social Studies.

Literature Review

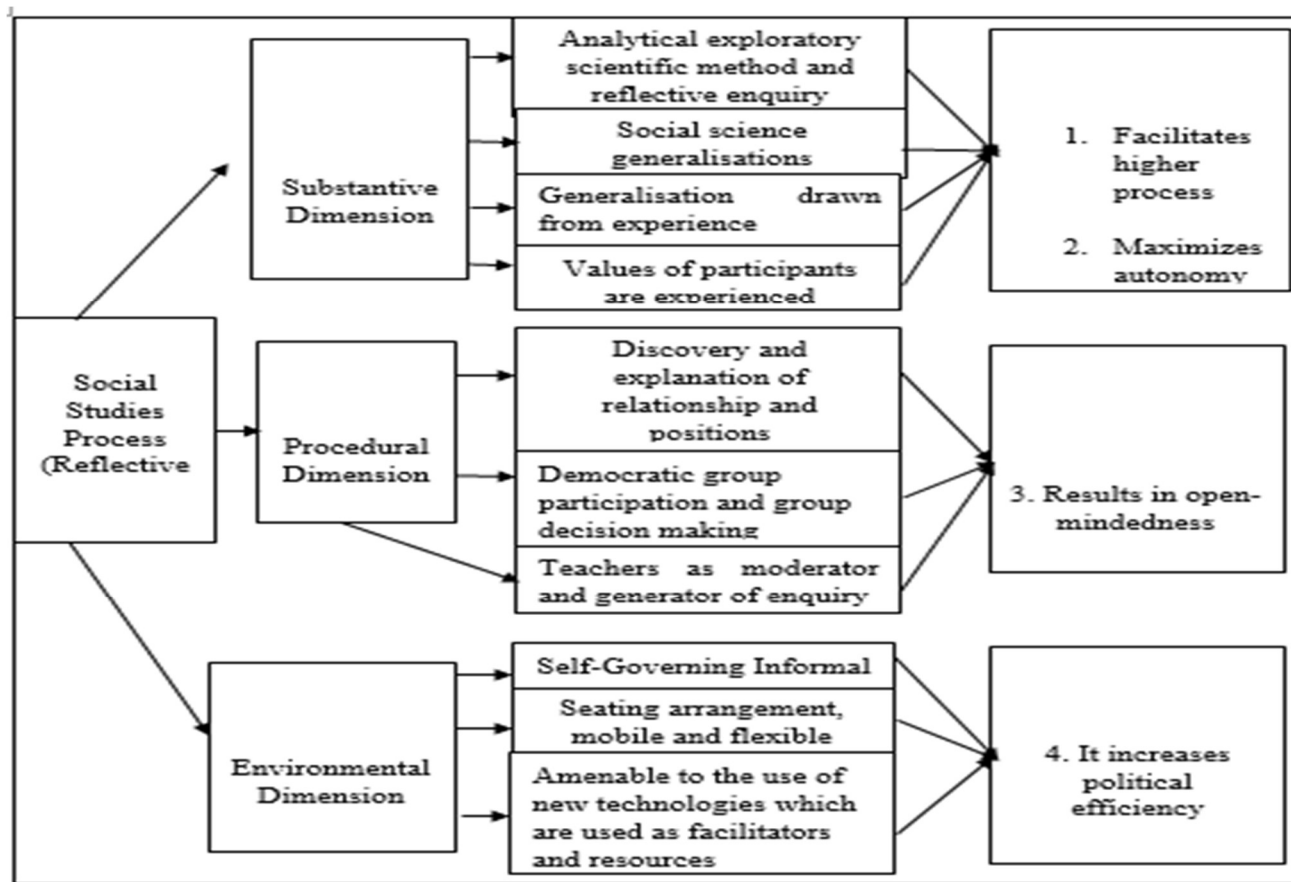
To examine Social Studies teachers' skills and competencies in using the inquiry-based method, the social inquiry model by Massialas (1991) served as the theoretical framework. This model engages students in exploration and reflection of authentic social problems, controversies or dilemmas, which guide students through the stages of inquiry, research, evidence gathering, analysis and review to resolve, solve, and take a position on a social issue. The teacher generally is the initiator of inquiry and guides the process from phase to phase to explore or solve a problem. According to Ma (2003), the social inquiry model allows students to examine their assumptions and beliefs in evaluating their biases, prejudices or attitudes through self-reflection and critical debate to identify how they influence perceptions of others and their understanding of the world.

From Figure 1, the social inquiry has three major dimensions. That is the Substantive, Procedural, and Environmental dimension. Under the substantive extent, four activities take place. They are employing analytical explanatory scientific and reflective methods of investigation, using social science generalizations, generalizations drawn from experience, and

examining the participants' values. Thus, for learners to inquire and investigate problems or issues of personal and social significance, they ought to employ analytical exploratory scientific and reflective modes of inquiry; use social science generalizations, and, among other things, activities to undertake the task. The procedural dimension focuses on the “how” aspect of the substantive activity of inquiring into issues and problems. There are three processes to be undertaken regarding the procedures to be followed. These are the discovery and explanation of relationships and positions, democratic group participation and group decision-making, and the role of the teacher in moderating and generating the inquiry. Under the environmental dimension, the focus shifts to milieu conditions or aspects that facilitate an investigation. There are three activities, informal self-governing processes by which learners get optimum freedom to operate, mobile and use new technologies as deriving information.

Competence for inquiry teaching of Social Studies encompasses the teacher's awareness and understanding of some of the issues surrounding inquiry-based teaching. These include knowledge of common ways of knowing, skills in inquiry and how to teach them, skills in questioning in inquiry teaching, and the ability to identify topics and themes suited for inquiry teaching. Others are how to develop curiosity and independent thought in students and the ability to elicit students' questions (Iyamu & Otote, 2006). The student goes through these processes and activities to attain four goals: to facilitate higher mental functions, enhance the student's autonomy, promote critical thinking and increase the student's civic competencies. Through these processes, there will be an equilibrium of students' capacity and the willingness to participate in solving personal and contemporary societal issues.

Figure 1: Social Inquiry Model



Source: Adopted from Massialas (1991)

This change in approach will enable learners to communicate directly with other students for meaningful lessons through the inquiry-based method of teaching Social Studies. Through this process, learners develop critical thinking and problem-solving, creative thinking and innovation, digital literacy, and communication skills (NaCCA, 2019). Inquiry-based teaching method demands a pedagogical paradigm shift because the current teaching is drastically different from the way Social Studies needs to be learnt by students. In line with this, the inquiry-based teaching method presupposes the use of activities that give students enough opportunities to participate actively in the instructional process (Iyamu & Otote, 2006). In an inquiry instructional setting, students contribute to the generation of their own knowledge, thereby enable them develop curiosity, creativity, and abilities to engage in independent thinking and problem-solving.

The exposure of varied information to students through numerous technological platforms and resources, students' demand teaching methods, techniques and strategies that stimulate critical thinking, innovativeness, collaboration, communication, problem-solving, leadership traits and curiosity. Social Studies teachers must adopt teaching and learning techniques that allow students to become active participants during instruction. The brainstorming, discussion, debate,

problem-solving, discovery technique and divergent questioning will enable students to discuss, analyze, synthesize, evaluate issues and problems and apply a tactful approach in dealing with such issues to create liberation for the community. Social Studies teachers must adhere to the following steps during the instructional period:

- i. Identifying the problem and information
- ii. Designing hypothesis
 - a. Designing analytical questions
 - b. Stating the hypothesis
 - c. Being aware of the idea formed
- iii. Identifying the logic of the implications of the hypothesis to the overall issue
- iv. Collecting data and information
 - a. Determining what data is required
 - b. Select or reject sources
- v. Analyze, evaluate and interpret data or information
 - a. Select relevant data
 - b. Evaluate sources
 - c. Interpret data or information
- vi. Evaluating hypothesis based on data
 - a. Modify the hypothesis
 - b. Start or state generalization (Edwin Fenton, 1967 as cited in Shanmugavelu et al., 2020)

Students will enjoy, develop interest and find the relevance of the subject of Social Studies when Social Studies teachers plan intended behavioural objectives, design teaching materials, design questioning strategies, design teaching and learning strategies, integration of technological resources and evaluate procedures and techniques to be used before the actual instructional period.

Methodology

The conceptual lens through which the researchers conducted this study emanates from the positivist paradigm with an epistemological viewpoint. The descriptive survey research design was used for this study. The descriptive survey design is appropriate for this study because the study aims to describe, observe, and document JHS Social Studies teachers' inquiry-based skills as they naturally occur during the instructional period (Ogah, 2013). Again, the descriptive survey allowed the researchers to gain valuable insight into the current status of the phenomenon concerning the variables (inquiry-based skills of Social Studies teachers and the learning outcomes) from respondents (Frankel & Wallen, 2003). The target population for the study consisted of 74 Social Studies teachers teaching in the 74 Junior High Schools (JHS) in Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese District in the Central region of Ghana. As the population size was manageable, the researchers used the census survey to administer questionnaires to all the 74 JHS Social Studies teachers. Convenience sampling was used to observe 17 teachers representing (23%) of the population size. For triangulation purposes, the structured observation checklist and the close-ended questionnaire were used as the data collection instruments. The observation checklist comprised six levels of responses: Absent = 0; Weak = 1; Fair = 3; Good =

4; Very good = 5; Excellent = 6. The observation checklist afforded the researcher the opportunity to observe Social Studies teachers as they are actual engaged in teaching and learning process. Also, a two-point Likert scale questionnaire with a rubric (Agree =1; Disagree =2) was used as the data collection instrument. The use of both the observation checklist and close-ended questionnaire enabled the researchers to confirm, cross-validate and corroborate responses provided in the close-ended questionnaires to the inquiry-based skills employed by the Social Studies teacher during instruction. The content validity of the data collection instruments were ascertained by Ph. D. Curriculum and Instruction (Social Studies) candidates at the University of Cape Coast whiles 10 Junior High School Social Studies teachers within the Cape Coast Municipality were used for the pilot testing to establish the inter-item correlation for the items. The questionnaire yielded a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.72. The established reliability Cronbach alpha coefficient (0.72) falls within the acceptable coefficient of Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2005). Two of the researchers administered the questionnaires to the respondents whiles the other researcher conducted the observation. The researcher who conducted the observation holds a Bachelor of Education and Master of Philosophy in Curriculum and Instruction (Social Studies) as well pursuing a PhD in Curriculum and Instruction (Social Studies) at the University of Cape Coast. This presuppose that the researcher possesses the requisite knowledge and skill in the area of study and capable of observing and rating Junior High School Social Studies teacher pedagogical practices. The respondents were assured of confidentiality of information, anonymity of respondents and assured them of redraw of the study at any point of the data collection exercise. Research question 1 and 2 were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, frequencies and percentages.

Results

Research Question 1: What inquiry-based skills do Junior High Schools Social Studies teachers possess in the teaching and learning of Social Studies?

This research question sought to find out the specific inquiry-based skills of JHS Social Studies. Mean scores and standard deviations were used to compute items 1-7 in the observation checklist. A respondent with the needed inquiry-based skills was expected to score a mean score of 2.5 and above on an interval scale. Thus, a teacher who scores below the criterion mean of 2.5 on the particular item was considered not to possess the needed competence as far as that specific item was concerned. Furthermore, the questionnaire was used to ascertain JHS Social Studies teachers' knowledge of particular inquiry-based skills. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Inquiry Skills possessed by the JHS Social Studies Teachers – Observation Guide and Questionnaire

N/S	Statements	Observation Guide			Questionnaire		
		Means	Std. Dev	Remarks	Agree	Disagree	Total
1	Ability to guide students to sources of Social Studies information.	2.18	0.39	Not possessing	59(80.8)	14(19.1)	73(100)
2	Ability to encourage students to identify real social problems related to Social Studies lessons in the classroom.	1.94	0.24	Not possessing	68(93.1)	5(6.8)	73(100)
3	Ability to guide students to relate Social Studies teaching concepts and ideas to current issues and events in the local, national and international community.	2.88	0.33	Possessing	61(83.6)	12(16.4)	73(100)
4	Ability to urge students to analyze Social and personal issues and problems to discover relationships between the parts and how the aspects relate to the whole.	1.94	0.75	Not possessing	59(80.8)	14(19.2)	73(100)
5	Ability to encourage and involve students to examine a hypothesis to determine potential sources of evidence to support or reject their claim.	2.18	0.64	Not possessing	44(74.0)	19(26.1)	73(100)
6	Ability to encourage students to apply academic knowledge and skills to practical realities of life.	2.18	0.53	Not possessing	65(89.1)	8(11.1)	73(100)
7	Ability to motivate students to create novel situations and ideas that draw on their personal uniqueness and individuality.	2.94	0.24	Possessing	59(80.8)	14(19.1)	73(100)
Mean of Means		2.32	0.45				

Source:(Field Data, 2022)

The findings of the study portrayed an incongruence between respondents' responses to the close-ended questionnaire items and observation outcomes. The result from Table 1 shows that 59(80.8%) of the respondents agreed that they possessed the inquiry skill of guiding students to sources of Social Studies information, yet the ($M=2.18$; $SD = 0.39$) indicated that teachers did not have the needed inquiry-based skills to direct students to the sources of information. Again, 59(80.8%) of the respondents agreed that they possessed the inquiry skill to urge students to analyze issues and problems to discover relationships between the parts and how each aspect relate to the whole, yet respondents were observed not possessing the needed skills ($M=1.94$; $SD = 0.75$) during their teaching and learning process. Moreover, 61(83.6%) of the respondents agreed they possess the inquiry skill to encourage students to identify real social problems related to lessons in the classroom. Again, teachers did not have such inquiry-based skills during their instructional period ($M=1.94$; $SD = 0.24$). Alternatively, 68(93.1%) of the respondents agreed they possess the inquiry skill of guiding students to relate Social Studies teaching concepts and ideas to current issues and events in the local, national and international community.

To these specific inquiry-based skills, Social Studies teachers possessed inquiry-based skills during the instructional period ($M=2.88$; $SD = 0.33$). In addition to this, JHS Social Studies teachers were found to have the inquiry-based skill of motivating students to create novel situations and ideas that bear the stamp of their uniqueness and individuality ($M=2.94$; $SD = 0.24$). In generic terms, out of the seven items on the skills needed for inquiry-based teaching, JHS Social Studies teachers' level of possession was significant for only two. To elaborate on this assertion, the mean of means obtained ($MM = 2.32$; $MSD = 0.45$) indicated that participants did not possess the needed inquiry-based skills in the teaching and learning of Social Studies in the Junior High Schools in the Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese District.

Research Question 2: How do Junior High Schools Social Studies teachers use the inquiry method in the teaching and learning of Social Studies in the Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese District?

The intent of this question is to ascertain the usage of inquiry-based teaching methods in Social Studies to enhance the inquiry abilities of students. The findings on this question will be presented in Table 2.

Results from Table 2 show that 69(94.6%) of the respondents agreed they exhibit the skill of motivating students through rewards and reinforcements. Despite this claim, respondents were not competent in the exhibition of this inquiry-based skill ($M = 2.41$; $SD = 0.51$). Also, 64(87.6%) of the respondents agreed that they exhibit and employ varieties of teaching and learning resources, including out-of-school resources yet participants were not competent in using a variety of teaching and learning resources ($M = 0.71$; $SD = 0.56$). Contrarily to these findings, 68(92.2%) of the respondents agreed they provide clear, concise and adequate directions and sufficient time for students to think through and respond to questions. Social Studies teachers were competent in the exhibition of this inquiry-based teaching skill. Most of the questions posed by the respondents were specific, realistic, measurable, and unambiguous. A considerable thinking period was given for learners to think through their thoughts before responding to questions.

Table 2: Inquiry Skills exhibited by the JHS Social Studies Teachers – Observation Guide and Questionnaire

N/S	Statements	Observation Guide			Questionnaire		
		Means	Std. Dev	Remarks	Agree	Disagree	Total
1	The teacher asks open-ended/divergent questions that lead to the formation of defensible answers	2.41	0.51	Incompetent	61(83.6)	12(16.4)	73(100)
2	The teacher evenly distributes questions between and among students in-class interactions.	2.71	0.47	Competent	66(90.4)	7(9.6)	73(100)
3	The teacher provides clear, concise and adequate directions for students to think through and respond to questions.	2.82	0.39	Competent	60(82.2)	13(17.8)	73(100)
4.	The teacher provides sufficient time for students to think through and respond to questions.	2.54	0.41	Competent	60(82.2)	13(17.8)	73(100)
5	The teacher urges and helps students create novel situations and ideas that bear the stamp of their personal uniqueness and individuality.	2.35	0.49	Incompetent	58(79.5)	15(20.5)	73(100)
6	The teacher provides feedback and reinforcement for students' questions.	2.88	0.33	Competent	60(82.2)	13(17.8)	73(100)
7	The teacher redirects students' focus to the learning process and not the answers.	0.18	0.53	Incompetent	60(82.2)	13(17.8)	73(100)
8	The teacher employs a variety of teaching and learning resources, including out-of-school resources	0.76	0.56	Incompetent	64(87.6)	9(12.4)	73(100)
9	Teacher motivates students through rewards and reinforcements.	2.41	0.51	Incompetent	69(94.6)	4(5.5)	73(100)
	Mean of Means	2.07	0.47				

Source: (Field Data, 2022)

In addition, 66(90.4%) of the respondents agreed that they evenly distributed questions between and among students during the instructional period. Again, respondents proved that they were competent in exhibiting such questioning inquiry-based skills ($M = 2.71$; $SD = 0.47$). It is essential to state that Social Studies teachers did not use the questioning technique to stimulate students' participation during the instructional period, derive student attention during the instructional period, ensure differentiation and inclusion of students during teaching and use as a means of conducting oral assessment for learning. Irrespective of this, Social Studies teachers in the junior high schools in the study area were generally incompetent ($MM = 2.07$; $MSD = 0.47$) in using the inquiry-based methods of teaching and learning in Social Studies.

Discussion

Social Studies teachers are perceived to be initiators of inquiry process to stimulate the desire of students' exploration and reflection of personal and social problems. From the perspective of the Social Studies teacher, the study's findings revealed that they did not possess the needed inquiry skills to direct students to the sources of Social Studies information. This hinders the student's ability to search for information to buttress or engage in a discussion to ascertain the difference and similarities between different information. As the learning process becomes monologue, learners see Social Studies teachers as an embodiment of knowledge and the giver of information. Due to such occurrence, Grant et al, (2017) posit that the Social Studies classroom can no longer continue with the old-school mentality of teacher-directed and rote memorization of facts but rather shift the instructional discourse to a more open discussion and deliberations. Again, Social Studies teachers did not possess the ability to urge students to analyze social and personal issues and problems. Social Studies teachers predominately used the convergent questioning and lecturing techniques which prevented students' from discovering the relationships between parts and how each part relate to the whole concepts. This collaborates with the findings of Amani, and Fussy (2023), Curran (2022), Djalilov et al, (2023) and Iyamu and Otote (2006) that the questioning and answering method appears to be the main techniques of interaction between teachers and students during instruction. The finding also confirms the views of Tamakloe and Cobbold (2000) and Zengulaaru, and Nyamekye (2023) that the questioning and answering method appears to be one of the practical pedagogical tools that most social studies teachers possess and use in their instructional delivery.

Although most teachers possessed the skills of questioning technique, the most of them adopted the use of convergent questioning was mostly used. The convergent questioning technique used did not stimulate discussion which will allow students to analyze, synthesize and evaluate the worth of the information. The level of possession of inquiry-based skills demonstrated by teachers confirms the views of Mkpa (1993), Tamakloe (1998), Fitchett, and Moore (2022), Kwao (2002), Martinez (2022) that the major problem facing Social Studies education is the gross lack of appropriate pedagogical skills to probe the essential fundamental component of quality instruction and assessment practices. It is crucial that Social Studies teachers use divergent questioning techniques to stimulate argument in which students construct evidential claims in response. Again, the findings of this study collaborate with the findings of Banks (1990), Blege (2001), Akraasi (2002), Opata (2002) and Iyamu and Otote (2006) that teachers have found convenience in the use of expository teaching methods including lecture method as a result of over-populated classes. To this end, the traditional

way and the over-reliance on the shallow textbooks will not stimulate students' understanding, reflective thinking, curiosity or active minds to become active participants in Social Studies lessons. Irrespective of how the Social Studies curriculum has been developed, the intended learning philosophies and corresponding core competencies cannot be achieved, due to a lack of Social Studies teachers' commitment to using creative pedagogical approaches to stimulate active student participation in class.

Consequently, Social Studies teachers predominantly use rhetoric, and a monologue medium of instruction presents a shallow perspective of how issues and problems of Social Studies are contemporarily inclined, which demands students to share their thoughts, orientation, opinions and feelings. The absence of such dialogue and deliberations between the teacher and the students and among the students has caused students not to see the existing relationship between social studies and real-life situations because such communication curtails student's autonomy in learning, curbs open-mindedness and limits the use of alternative resources to validity and authenticity the trustfulness of information presented to them. The rote-learning “chew-pour-pass and forget” learning style has continuously eaten deep into students' minds regarding the teaching and learning of social studies. What needs to be championed as a competent Social Studies teacher is to reflect upon their practice and to employ appropriate methods that will accommodate multidisciplinary discussion that will provide opportunities for learners to acquire the knowledge and develop the skills, attitudes and values that will enable them to become engaged, active, informed, innovative and responsible citizens. Such a target can be achieved when inquiry-based method is encapsulated in the teaching and learning of the subject. It is imperative to state that Social Studies need to be learned through exploration, and critical and imaginative thinking where the substantive, procedural, environmental dimension is activated as a social studies reflective process.

The inquiry-based method affords the Social Studies teacher an array of creative pedagogies (brainstorming, discussion, debate, problem-solving, discovery, project-based, gaming, demonstration, modelling as well as the use of divergent questioning and answering technique) that gives room for students to become active participants to use reflective minds to discuss, analyze, synthesize, evaluate issues, problems and apply the tactful approach in dealing with such issues to create liberation for the community. These pedagogies, when used, will stimulate critical thinking, innovativeness, collaboration, communication, problem-solving, leadership traits, curiosity, and honesty within and among students. This assertion is confirmed by Park-Rogers and Abell (2008) and Firmender (2014) that learners will be engaged in scientifically oriented questions; give priority to evidence, thereby allowing them to develop and evaluate explanations that address scientifically oriented questions; formulate answers in the light of alternative explanations, particularly those reflecting scientific understanding; and communicate and justify their proposed explanations. In this regard, the researchers view inquiry-based instruction as a teaching approach in which there is the creation of an enabling environment for learners to engage in student-centred activities in the form of investigations, using their background knowledge and experiences to address problems or issues that confront their survival as individuals and as members of a larger community (Shanmugavelu, et al, 2020).

By implication, the substantive dimension of Social Studies teachers were lacking. This hindered the analytical explanatory, scientific and reflective methods of investigation. As a result, learners autonomy in the learning process to engage in meaningful learning and

construct their own knowledge were limited. Again, there were limitation to the extent of transfer of knowledge by students as they found it difficult to discover sources of information to enable them establish the relationship that exist between and among concepts of different disciplines to deepen understanding and stimulate learning. The lack of curiosity and independent thought in students due to Social Studies teachers inadequate use of inquiry-based technique of teaching hinders students' higher mental functions, autonomy, critical thinking and active participation in class (Iyamu & Otote, 2006). It is therefore imperative of Social Studies teachers to acquire and use the skill of inquiry-based teaching to enhance students critical thinking skills because the technique enhances learner's interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inferences, explanation and self-regulation skills which are fundamental to critical, analytical and reflective thinking (Wale & Bishaw, 2020).

Conclusions

The essential qualities of a Social Studies teacher are critical to effective teaching and learning of the subject "Social Studies". The findings of the study highlighted the existence of a theoretical and practical gap in the use of inquiry-based skills in teaching Social Studies. The findings showed an apparent contradiction between responses from the questionnaire and the observation guide. Social Studies teachers agreed they possess the ability to guide students to search for information on personal and societal issues yet through the observation of Social Studies teachers instruction they did not engage students to search for information. The lecturing technique was dominating during the lesson delivery. Also, Social Studies teachers agreed they possess the inquiry-based skill of encouraging students to identify real social problems related to Social Studies lessons. However, by observing teachers teach, it was discovered that they do not allow the students to explore nor engage in reflective enquiry. This hindered the active participation of students in the lesson thereby lowing learners' rate of maximum autonomy to engage in meaningful learning. Moreover, Social Studies teachers agreed they were competent in the use of a variety of teaching and learning resources to engage students during instruction, redirect students' focus to the learning process and ask divergent questions that lead to the formation of defensible answer. There were room for class discussion which enabled learners to exhibit democratic traits and values such as tolerance, listening and speaking skills, cooperation and group decision making.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the identified theoretical and practical gap of the skills and usage of the inquiry-based technique, it is recommended that District Education Unit and the Circuit Supporters should organize a three-week workshop training on how to use the inquiry-based technique practically or Junior High Schools Social Studies teachers. This will enable Social Studies teachers competent in the necessary skills and knowledge for effectively applying inquiry-based methods in the teaching of Social Studies. For meaningful learning among students to thrive, Social Studies teachers should consciously adopt the inquiry-based method of instruction to ignite critical thinking, innovativeness, collaboration, communication, problem-solving, leadership traits, and curiosity among students. The reflective minds of students are developed through discussion, analyzing, synthesizing, evaluation of issues, problems and apply the tactful approach in dealing with personal and societal problems. It is again

recommended that Social Studies teachers use technological resources to present the contemporary problems to students to enable them to experience what they cannot experience from the textbooks. It is envisaged that when these recommendations are taken into consideration, they will contribute to the development of an effective teaching method for improving students learning outcomes and strengthen teachers' ability to deliver effective inquiry-based instruction.

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

The scope of the study focused on only Social Studies teachers teaching in the 74 Junior High Schools in Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese District of Ghana. Again, social inquiry model by Massialas (1991) served as the bases of examining the inquiry-based skills of JHS Social Studies teachers. Given these two delimitations, other researcher can conduct similar study in other region and adopt different theories to ascertain the inquiry-based skills of Social Studies teachers. On the other hand, the study was purely quantitative in nature, which yielded numeric data to address the research problem. Future researchers need to adapt either a qualitative or a mixed methods approach to study examine the skills and usage of the inquiry-based technique among Social Studies teachers in Ghana. Through this approach, both depth and breadth will be covered to gain more insight in the problem under investigation.

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Authors' Contributions

Clarke EbowYalley (CEY), Adwoa Dufie Adjei (ADA) and Ernest Sarpong Akore (ESA) contributed equally towards the completion of this article. CEY wrote the background, statement of the problem and literature review, ADA wrote the methodological aspect of this article whiles ESA did the analysis and discussion of results. All the three authors (CEY, ADA, and ESA) collected the data, wrote the conclusions and recommendations as well as proof-read the manuscript for approval. All authors are equally accountable to the information and current form of this manuscript.

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