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Teaching Methods and Student Engagement in Geography: Implications for Social Studies Education in Calabar, Nigeria

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Abstract
The purpose of this study was to investigate teaching methods and student engagement in Geography: Implications for Social Studies Education in Calabar, Nigeria. This study adopted the ex-post facto research design. Two research questions and null hypotheses guided the study. A sample of two hundred (200) respondents were randomly selected for the study using stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Two researcher-developed instruments tagged 'Teaching Method Questionnaire (TMQ)' and 'Students' Geography Engagement Scale (SGES)' were used for data collection. The instruments were subjected to face validity by an expert in Geography Education and two experts in measurement and evaluation in the College of Education, University of Calabar. The reliability estimate of the instruments were established using the Cronbach Alpha reliability method. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) analysis was the statistical analysis tool adopted to test the hypotheses under study at .05 level of significance. The results of the analysis revealed that discussion and demonstration teaching methods significantly relate with students' engagement in Geography. Based on the findings of the study it was recommended that

teachers should always vary their teaching methods so as to actively engage students in the teaching and learning of Geography and all other school subjects.

Keywords: Teaching method, students' engagement, innovative teaching method, discussion method, demonstration method.

Introduction

The significance of Geography in comprehending the complex and interrelated variables that influence the planet is undeniable. Geography is not simply a collection of locations and names; it is a crucial discipline that fosters an informed populace and propels national progress. It offers a fundamental comprehension of the intricate interactions between human cultures and their environs. This provides individuals with spatial literacy and critical thinking abilities essential for navigating humanity's intricate and interrelated reality. In a time characterized by urgent global issues like climate change, resource depletion, urbanization, and geopolitical transformations, the significance of geographical knowledge is becoming evident (Unimna & Ukwayi, 2023; Ukwayi et al., 2023).

The advancement of a nation is inherently connected to its comprehension of Geography. Geographical insights are essential for optimizing agricultural yields according to soil and climatic patterns, developing sustainable urban centres and infrastructure, and efficiently handling natural calamities. Geography influences strategic decision-making in domains such as trade routes, resource distribution, and national defense, utilizing natural obstacles and rivers for security and economic benefit. Furthermore, Geography nurtures an awareness for varied cultures and surroundings, enhancing social cohesiveness and advancing global citizenship, which are essential components for a genuinely prosperous nation.

Notwithstanding the indispensable role of Geography to the growth and sustainability of nations, the teaching and learning of Geography in many educational settings especially in developing climes like Nigeria often grapple with challenges that hinder its full potential (Onuoha & Ekpoto, 2021; Ekpoto et al., 2022). Traditional, teacher-centred methodologies, heavily reliant on rote memorization and passive information reception, have been identified as significant contributors to low student engagement and, consequently, diminished academic performance (Johnson et al., 2024; Muhammed et al., 2021; Nkanu et al. 2025; Nkanu et al. 2024). Such approaches can render Geography abstract and detached from real-world applications, leading students to perceive it as a difficult or irrelevant subject (Ukwayi, et al., 2024; Wichendu, 2022).

This disengagement presents a critical impediment to cultivating geographically literate individuals capable of contributing meaningfully to nation-building efforts. When students are not actively involved in the learning process, their capacity for critical thinking, problem-solving, and the application of geographical concepts to real-life scenarios is severely limited (Wichendu, 2022). This calls for a paradigm shift in pedagogical approaches, moving away from conventional methods towards more innovative, student-centred strategies that actively involve learners in the construction of knowledge. Therefore, this study investigates the impact of innovative and student-centred teaching method, specifically the discussion method and demonstration method, on students' engagement in Geography. The rationale for focusing on these methods is rooted in their potential to transform the learning experience from passive reception to active participation.

Teaching is a method that facilitates the attainment of certain goals by inducing favourable transformations in learners. Advancements in digital pedagogical tools and the growing diversity of senior secondary student enrollment from non-traditional backgrounds are compelling educators to continually reassess their methodologies for contemporary relevance and accommodate various learning styles. To ensure effective teaching across many learning styles, numerous research advocate for the implementation of active teaching methodologies. Active teaching approaches are characterized by "instructional activities that engage students in doing tasks and reflecting on their actions" (Muhammed et al., 2021; Unimna et al., 2017). The employment of active teaching method is thought to enhance student engagement in the learning process, resulting in deeper comprehension and improved performance (Johnson et al., 2024; Muhammed et al., 2021; Nkanu et al. 2025; Nkanu et al. 2024).

The primary purpose of teaching at any level of education is to bring a fundamental change that is relatively permanent in learners (MacFarlane & Tomlinson, 2017). To enhance knowledge transfer, educators should choose suitable teaching approaches that align with particular aims and learning outcomes. In the traditional era, numerous educators predominantly employed teacher-centred approaches to convey knowledge to students, as opposed to student-centred ways. In the realm of educational research, inquiries regarding the efficacy of teaching methodologies and student participation have persistently garnered significant attention (Robert et al., 2022). Furthermore, research on pedagogical approaches fosters advancement in students' learning. Quite remarkably, the lack of engagement by the majority of students is fundamentally linked to the application of inactive teaching method by teachers to impart knowledge to learners (Johnson et al., 2024; Nkanu et al. 2024; Nkanu et al. 2025).

It is on the heels of the foregoing that this study aims to examine teaching methods and student engagement in Geography: Implications for Social Studies Education in Calabar, Nigeria.

Statement of the problem

A worry has been reported over the years as to the decline in students' performance in secondary schools especially at certificate examination. While a number of efforts has been made by concerned stakeholders – researchers, government, curriculum planners, etc., to reversing the worrisome trend, the situation seems to have defied solutions. These researchers, considering the pivotal place of the teacher in the teaching-learning environment believes that a look into some of the methods used by the teacher in engaging students might elicit the long-awaited change that every stakeholder in the education sector looks forward to. This study considers teaching method and students' engagement in Senior Secondary II Geography in Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State. It intends to provide answer to: what teaching method(s) enhance productive students' engagement in Senior Secondary II Geography in Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State?

Literature review

Discussion method

The core idea underpinning the discussion method is that collective knowledge and diverse viewpoints lead to richer solutions and deeper understanding (Abdu-Raheem, 2016). This method positions students not as passive recipients but as active contributors to knowledge construction. The key implication here is, enhanced higher-order thinking; discussion inherently propels students beyond rote memorization. As emphasised by Stephens and Stephens (2016), it stimulates advanced cognitive processes such as application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and creativity. Through the art of engaging in debate (Akinleye, 2010) and clarifying ideas through brainstorming (Adewuya, 2016), students are compelled to process information actively, transforming it into usable knowledge.

Discuss method also elicit the development of critical social skills; Abdu-Raheem (2016) and Stephens and Stephens (2016) highlight the invaluable role of discussion in cultivating essential social competencies: speaking articulately, active listening, and respectful hearing of diverse perspectives. This nurtures teamwork, communication, and idea clarification, skills crucial for collaborative problem-solving in any field, including Geography (Abdu-Raheem, 2016). Dillion (2016) further suggests discussion builds the understandings and skills necessary for participatory democracy, underscoring its broader societal implications. Scholars also advance that discussion method aids motivation and confidence building

(Stephens & Stephens, 2016). Research also asserts that encountering new perspectives through discussion revitalizes the motivation to learn and allows each student to express their opinion, which enhances learning efficacy and reduces reliance on rote memorization (Abdu-Raheem, 2016). Yusuf and Ai-Banawi (2020) affirm that active involvement in class discussions boosts students' desire to learn. This is especially strengthened by the teacher technically leaving his/her traditional role as a dispenser of knowledge and embracing the role of a facilitator. For discussion to be productive, the teacher's role shifts from a lecturer to a skilled facilitator who guides inquiries, provides elucidations (Abdu-Raheem, 2016), clarifies viewpoints, and adjusts reward systems to encourage participation (Brookfield & Preskill, 2019). This requires teachers to be adept at managing differing opinions (Kochnar, 2019) and ensuring students possess adequate prior knowledge for meaningful contribution.

The implication for Geography Education specifically is that, the discussion method is vital for exploring complex issues like environmental sustainability, urbanization challenges, or geopolitical conflicts, where multiple perspectives and ethical considerations are paramount. It allows students to produce information from various sources, debate solutions to real-world problems, and distinguish between facts, knowledge, and reality (Akinleye, 2010). Abudu-Raheem (2016) strongly advocates for Geography educators to prioritize discussion to deepen understanding and enhance learning efficacy among secondary school students.

Demonstration method

The demonstration method is characterized by the teacher actively illustrating concepts, principles, or procedures through the manipulation of real materials, providing a direct link between "knowing about" and "being able to do" (Saskatchewan, 2016). The crucial implication here involves the concrete understanding of abstract concepts; Vikoo (2017) and Effiong (2018) categorise demonstration within psychomotor and cognitive development. This emphasizes its ability to convey procedural understanding and manual dexterity. This method is particularly effective when concepts are abstract or require a visual understanding, as it allows learners to see clearly what is happening (Saskatchewan, 2016) and enables the teacher to reaffirm and elucidate topics through vivid visuals and manipulation of materials (Effiong, 2018).

The demonstration method encourages enhanced engagement through active observation and participation. Ogwo and Oranu (2016) highlight that demonstration is highly effective due to active student participation. In this method, students do not just watch; they are urged to formulate predictions and articulate observations (Saskatchewan, 2016), making the learning process more dynamic. This active engagement captures interest, assesses prior knowledge

through explanatory questions (Ogwo & Oranu, 2016), and fosters curiosity and independent thought (Brown, 2019).

Demonstration method stirs up in students problem-solving and "learning how to learn" competencies. Duch (2020) powerfully describes demonstration as challenging students to "learn how to learn" by cooperatively seeking solutions to real-world problems. Prpic and Hadgraft (2021) clarify that demonstration goes beyond mere application of existing knowledge; it introduces new concepts and strategies for acquiring them, fostering adaptability and problem-solving skills in novel situations.

Lastly, demonstration method positions the teacher as expert modeler and questioner. The effectiveness of demonstration hinges on the teacher's proficiency in relevant themes, ability to ask pertinent questions, develop curiosity, and elicit student questions (Ogwo & Oranu, 2016; Kona, 2019). This requires careful planning and a deep understanding of the subject matter to select appropriate events for demonstration.

For Geography, the demonstration method is invaluable for illustrating physical processes (e.g., erosion, tectonic plate movement), interpreting complex data (e.g., GIS mapping, weather charts), or understanding spatial relationships. It provides a direct, observable link between theoretical geographical principles and their real-world manifestations. Through enabling students to "see" how geographical phenomena work, demonstration cultivates rewarding practical abilities (Saskatchewan, 2016), fosters a cooperative learning atmosphere, encourages peer relations, and ultimately boosts academic achievement (Prpic & Hadgraft, 2021).

Purpose of the study

This study specifically seeks to establish:

1. How discussion teaching method relates with students' engagement in Geography.
2. How demonstration teaching method relates with students' engagement in Geography.

Research questions

The following research questions were posed to give direction to the study:

1. How does discussion teaching method relates with students' engagement in Geography?
2. How does demonstration teaching method relates with students' engagement in Geography?

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Research hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide this study:

1. Discussion teaching method does not significantly relate with students' engagement in Geography.
2. Demonstration teaching method does not significantly relate with students' engagement in Geography.

Research method

The research design adopted for this study was ex-post facto design. This research was conducted in Calabar Metropolis of Cross River State. The population of this study comprised all senior secondary (SS) students of public schools which was 3102 students for 2024/2025 academic session (Cross River State Secondary Education Board, 2025).

Multistage sampling procedure involving stratified, simple random sampling techniques and purposive sampling was used in the study. Firstly, Calabar Metropolis was stratified into two – Calabar Municipal Council and Calabar South Local Government Area. This was to ensure schools from these two council areas make up the constitution of the study's sample. Secondly, four schools were purposively selected from each of the two council areas. Lastly, the simple random sampling technique was used to select 25 students from each of the selected eight schools to form the study's sample. Hence, the sample of this study was made up of two hundred (200) students randomly selected from the eight selected secondary schools in Calabar Metropolis of Cross River State.

The instruments used in obtaining data for this research, were a researcher - developed questionnaire tagged "Teaching method (TMQ)" and Students' Geography Engagement Scale (SGES)". The TMQ has two sections. Section A focused on a letter of introduction and respondents' personal data, while section B has a 10-item question on teaching methods used by teachers in teaching Geography. The responses contain the modified 4-point Likert rating scale of strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D), and strongly disagree (SD). The second instrument, Students' Geography Engagement Scale (SGES) also has two sections. Section A consisted respondents' personal data, while section B contained a 10-item scale on students' engagement in Geography. The responses are structured on the modified 4-point Likert rating scale of strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D), and strongly disagree (SD).

Three experts in test and measurement in the College of Education, University Calabar meticulously examined the questionnaire's contents. All requisite amendments to the draft were implemented prior to the instrument being deemed appropriate for further study.

Reliability estimate of internal consistency was obtained through Cronbach's Alpha for both TMQ and SGES. The coefficients were 0.74 and 0.79 respectively. The researchers directly administered the questionnaire with the assistance of Geography teachers in the selected schools. All the administered questionnaire were retrieved by the researchers on the spot.

Results

HO_1

Discussion teaching method does not significantly relate with students' engagement in Geography. The independent variable is discussion method of teaching while the dependent variable is students' engagement in Geography. The statistical tool adopted in testing this hypothesis was the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r). The result of the analysis is shown in Table 1.

The result of the analysis in Table 1 reveals that the p-value of .000 is less than the significance level of 0.05 with 198 degrees of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis that stated that, discussion teaching method does not significantly relate with students' engagement in Geography was rejected; while the alternate hypothesis which states that discussion teaching method significantly relates with students' engagement in Geography was upheld. This implies that discussion method significantly relates with students' engagement in Geography.

Table 1 - Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) analysis of the relationship between discussion method and students' engagement in Geography (N=200)

Variable	Mean	SD	r-value	p-value
Discussion method	20.41	1.49		
			.265*	.000
Students' engagement	20.25	1.87		

* Significant at .05 level, critical r = .138, df = 198

HO_2

Demonstration teaching method does not significantly relate with students' engagement in Geography. The independent variable is demonstration method while the dependent variable is students' engagement in Geography. The statistical tool applied in testing this hypothesis was the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r). The result of the analysis is presented in Table 2.

The result of the analysis presented in Table 2 shows that the p-value of .000 is less than the 0.05 levels of significance with 198 degrees of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis that stated that, demonstration teaching method does not significantly relate with students' engagement in Geography was rejected. This means that demonstration teaching method significantly relates with students' engagement in Geography.

Table 2 - Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) analysis of the relationship between demonstration method and students' engagement in Geography (N=200)

Variable	Mean	SD	r-value	p-value
Demonstration method	20.43	1.37		
			.389*	.000
Students' engagement	20.25	1.87		

*Significant at .05 level, critical r = .138, df = 198

Discussion of findings

The findings on hypothesis one indicates that discussion method have a significant relationship with students' engagement in Geography. This finding is consistent with Abdu-Raheem (2016) who remarked that discussion method of teaching engages both teachers and students in thinking, and develops in students' social skills of talking, hearing and listening. The finding also aligns with Stephens and Stephens (2016), who opined that discussion method is a process of giving and taking, speaking and listening, describing and witnessing which helps expand horizons and foster mutual understanding.

The finding of hypothesis two reveals that, demonstration method has a significant relationship with students' engagement in Geography. This finding agrees with Ogwo and Oranu (2016) who affirmed that demonstration method is highly effective because it involves active participation of the students; it captures the students' interest reference to the intended learning outcomes and some explanatory questions to establish their current knowledge and understanding. This finding is also in agreement with Duch (2020) who described

demonstration strategy as a teaching method that challenges students to “learn how to learn”, working cooperatively in groups to seek solutions to real world problems.

It is worthy of note to state here that, while the discussion method nurtures crucial cognitive and social skills, the demonstration method in Geography offers a unique advantage by providing concrete, multi-sensory, and real-world-connected learning experiences. This ability to make abstract geographical concepts tangible and to directly involve students in the practical application of knowledge likely contributes to its stronger correlation with student engagement in this study.

Limitations of the study

This study offers significant insights into 'Teaching Methods and Student Engagement in Geography: Implications for Social Studies Education in Calabar, Nigeria,' yet it is constrained by specific limitations that necessitate recognition and contemplation for subsequent research.

First, using self-report measures to measure student engagement can lead to self-report bias. Participants may have responded in a socially desirable manner, exaggerating their engagement or minimising difficulties, rather than offering completely accurate representations of their actual experiences. Although measures were implemented to preserve anonymity and confidentiality to reduce bias, the fundamentally subjective nature of self-reported data indicates that the reported levels of engagement may not accurately correspond with objective behavioural observations. Subsequent research may explore the integration of multi-method approaches, including direct observation or physiological measures, to triangulate findings and provide a more holistic understanding of student engagement.

Secondly, the restricted geographic scope of this study limits the generalisability of its findings. The study was conducted solely in Calabar Metropolis, comprising merely two of the 18 Local Government Areas in Cross River, Nigeria. As a result, the socio-cultural, educational, and economic contexts particular to this capital city may have distinctly shaped the identified correlations between teaching methodologies and student engagement. Consequently, it remains ambiguous whether these findings would be applicable to students situated in diverse geographical contexts, educational frameworks, cultural backgrounds, or resource availability. Subsequent studies should endeavour to replicate this research in various geographical contexts to augment the external validity and generalisability of the findings to a wider population.

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Implications for Social Studies Education

The findings of this study showed that discussion and demonstration methods of teaching significantly relate with students' engagement in Geography in the study area. These findings hold the following implications for Social Studies education:

Necessity for active teaching methodologies: The study strongly suggests that Social Studies educators should move away from traditional, teacher-centred methods that rely on rote memorization and passive reception of information. These methods lead to low students' engagement and diminished academic performance. Instead, active teaching approaches, which involve students in doing tasks and reflecting on their actions, are crucial for enhancing engagement, deeper comprehension, and improved performance.

Emphasis on discussion method for enhanced engagement and critical thinking: The study's findings highlight that discussion teaching method significantly relates to students' engagement in Geography. For Social Studies, this means prioritizing classroom discussions to foster critical thinking, social competencies (speaking, hearing, listening), and the ability to encounter new perspectives and insights. It also encourages students to clarify ideas, promote teamwork, and reduce reliance on rote memorization.

Leveraging demonstration method for practical application and skill development: The research indicates a significant relationship between demonstration teaching method and students' engagement. For Social Studies, this implies incorporating demonstrations to illustrate concepts, principles, and tangible items through explanations and manipulation of actual materials. This method is effective in developing both psychomotor and cognitive skills; which in turn fosters an understanding of procedures, and cultivation of manual dexterity. It also helps establish the connection between "knowing about" and "being able to do".

Addressing disengagement by shifting pedagogical paradigms: The article points out that disengagement in Geography, often due to abstract and detached teaching method, limits students' capacity for critical thinking, problem-solving, and applying concepts to real-life scenarios. This is directly applicable to Social Studies, suggesting a vital need for a paradigm shift towards innovative, student-centred strategies that actively involve learners in knowledge construction to prevent the subject from being perceived as difficult or irrelevant.

Importance of prior knowledge for productive discussions: For discussions to be productive, students must possess prior knowledge and information about the topic. In Social Studies, this suggests that teachers need to ensure students have a foundational understanding before engaging in deep discussions, possibly through pre-reading assignments or introductory activities.

Teacher training and adaptability: The study implicitly calls for continuous professional development for Social Studies teachers to keep them abreast of innovative teaching methods.

Teachers need to be skilled in guiding discussions, eliciting student questions, and selecting appropriate events for demonstrations to develop curiosity and independent thought.

Promoting global citizenship and social cohesiveness: The broader significance of Geography in fostering awareness for varied cultures and surroundings, thereby enhancing social cohesiveness and advancing global citizenship, is highlighted. This implication is directly transferable to Social Studies Education, emphasizing its role in preparing students to be informed and engaged citizens in a complex and interconnected world.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusion was made.

i. Discussion teaching method significantly relates with students' engagement in Geography.
ii. Demonstration teaching method significantly relates with students' engagement in Geography.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made from the findings:

1. Teachers should always vary their teaching methods so as to actively engage students in the teaching and learning of Geography and all other school subjects.
2. Teachers should ensure they are always abreast of innovative teaching methods in order to win students' confidence and stir them to do better in their studies.
3. Policymakers should embed the explicit expectation of diverse, student-centred teaching methods into national, state and local education policies.
4. Teacher training programmes should significantly increase practical modules on diverse teaching methods (e.g., demonstration, discussion, project-based learning, inquiry-based learning, technology integration), ensuring trainees gain hands-on experience designing and implementing varied lessons.
5. Curricula should be designed with enough flexibility to allow teachers to adapt methods to student needs and local contexts.

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