

Empirical Analysis of Equity, Environmental Awareness, and Sustainable Development in Social Studies Classrooms

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Abstract

This study investigated the integration of equity, environmental consciousness, and sustainable development assumptions in Social Studies pedagogy across Nigerian secondary schools with particular reference to Osun state. It inquired the differences based on school type and gender, and assessed the association between problems faced by teachers and their use of reformation teaching strategies. This study was grounded in transformative learning theory which emphasizes critical reflection and perspective change in teaching and learning. A descriptive survey design was used, and data were gathered through two sets of questionnaire tagged Teacher Transformative Teaching Practices Questionnaire (TTTPQ) for teachers and Student Perception and Awareness Scale (SPAS) for students which were pilot tested with a reliability coefficients of 0.84 and 0.81 respectively while the validity was done through experts review. The population of the study comprised 20,506 Junior secondary school II students and 657 Social Studies teachers. Simple random sampling technique was used to select a sample of 300 students made up of 150 males and 150 females and 45 teachers. Statistical tools including t-test and multiple regression were used for data analysis. Findings showed a major difference in the degree to which teachers blend innovative content based on school type, with 75% of respondents affirming differences between public and private schools. Gender-specific analysis indicated that students' impressions and understanding of fairness and sustainability significantly differed, as reported by 65% of respondents. The study suggest the need for skill development among Social Studies teachers and the provision of fair-minded teaching resources across school types among others.

Keywords: Social Studies, Equity, Environmental Awareness, Sustainable Development, Transformative Teaching

Word Count: 250

Introduction

21st century presents a combination of social, environmental, and economic problems that require not only rational citizens, but also obligated and dynamic change agents. Issues such as climate change, environmental deterioration, uneven distribution of resources, and social marginalisation have reshaped the educational discourse in the world over. In response, educators and the policymakers are increasingly championing for transformative education one that equips learners to critically engage with the world, question injustice, and act for a sustainable future (Oyetero & Ibrahim, 2023; United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 2020). At the heart of innovative education lies Social Studies, a subject uniquely unparalleled to address the incorporated goals of fairness, environmental consciousness, and sustainable development. Social Studies, by its nature, investigates human interactions, cultural differences, public responsibilities, and socio-economic advancement. In the view of (Ajiboye & Odetola, 2021; Ogundele, 2022) these critical dimensions provide flourish ground for nurturing values such as inclusion, fairness, and sustainability values essential to enhancing peaceful and progressive societies.

This study is lead the way by transformative learning theory propounded by Mezirow, (1991), which argue that purposeful studying take place when individuals seriously investigate existing presupposition reconsideration experiences, and establish new viewpoints that inspire enlightened engagement. The theory aligns with Social Studies education because it ensures analytical thinking, value shift, and solution focused mindset, core processes desired to integrate equity, environmental awareness, and sustainable development into classroom practice.

Yet, despite the growing world emphasis on education for sustainable development (ESD), the integration of fairness, accessibility, and environmental understanding into Social Studies classrooms remains a critical concern in many third world countries, including Nigeria. Research conducted by Adebajo, (2020); Oyeleke & Lawal, (2022) show that although Nigerian Social Studies curriculum contains elements of climate change education and citizenship, the actual classroom practices often fail to meet expectation due to a combination of curriculum inflexibility, teacher-centred teaching strategies, inadequate teacher training, and lack of modern instructional resources. Moreover, concerns of equity and involvement particularly in relation to gender, religion, economic status, and disablement are often under-addressed in Nigerian secondary school Social Studies instruction. Despite national education blueprint that enhance inclusive learning

(Federal Ministry of Education, 2021), differences persist in how students experience education based on their social homogeneity and geographic location. In the words of Akinbote & Aladejana, (2023) this erode the development of an inclusive civic values and weakens the benefits of Social Studies to ensure national integration and social justice.

Environmental education is also not yet fully integrated into teacher training or classroom delivery, even though Nigeria remains endangered to the impacts of climate change, including flooding, desertification, and food insecurity. UNESCO (2021) observed that transformative environmental education should not only impact knowledge, but also build learners' ability for logical reasoning, resilience, and environmental stewardship. Eze & Obiakor, (2023) posited that for this to be achieved in Nigeria, Social Studies teachers must be adequately educated and supported to deliver content that is locally impactful and globally informed.

Premised on these concerns, there is a persuasive need to reconceptualise Social Studies teaching in Nigeria to demonstrate the urgent desire of our time. This means moving beyond rote civic learning toward a more holistic and critical pedagogy that integrate fairness, environmental consciousness, and sustainable development goals (SDGs). Such a strategy aligns with SDG 4.7, which calls for education that ensure sustainable development, universal citizenship, and appreciation of cultural differences (UN, 2022). This study is therefore situated within this innovative agenda. It seeks to examine how Social Studies teachers in Nigerian secondary schools blend equity, environmental awareness, and sustainable development tenets into their teaching.

Statement of the Problem

Social Studies, as a major element of the school curriculum, is planned to enhance social values, political literacy, and civic responsibility among learners. One of its essential objective is to promote awareness and cheerfulness towards equity, environmental conduct, and sustainable development. In spite of the incorporation of this subject in the Nigerian curriculum, there is increasing worry that the actual classroom practices of Social Studies teachers do not sufficiently demonstrate these honours.

Numerous studies and evaluation reports have revealed consistent disparities in classroom involvement, inadequate integration of conservation education concepts, and a weak connection between teaching methods and the sustainable development goals (SDGs) (Oyeleke & Lawal, 2022; UN, 2022). It has been observed that many educators lack sufficient didactics training and

instructional materials to sensibly integrate concerns of social fairness and environmental stewardship into their lessons (Kehinde-Awoyele, Adeowu, & Jekayinoluwa, 2025). As a consequence, students' consciousness and dedication to sustainable living and equitableness remain low. Empirical evidence suggests that gaps persist in the way educators incorporate these concepts into pedagogy (Eze & Arinze, 2023). It may be argue that larger proportion of Social Studies classrooms still display gender categorize in engagement and teacher-students interplay, thereby compromising efforts to promote fairness and involvement, Similarly, differences in resource availability, effectiveness, and office support between public and private schools may impact the level to which environmental and sustainability concerns are effectively taught. As a result, students' attitudes towards low-impact, gender egalitarianism, and civic duty remain bumpy across school types. Kehinde-Awoyele, et., al, (2025) found that limited empirical studies have examined how gender and school type affect the inclusion of equity, environmental consciousness, and sustainable development in Social Studies classrooms in Nigeria. In addition, data-driven evidence on how effectively Social Studies classrooms are enhancing these interconnected concepts is still rare, particularly within the Nigerian context (Adeowu, 2025a). This inadequate of structured evidence makes it difficult for administrators and curriculum developer to design specific measures that propel inclusivity and sustainability in education. This gap in knowledge makes it very strenuous to appraise the current state of practice and to identify variables determining teachers' effectiveness in blending these critical world issues. Therefore, this study seeks to conduct an empirical analysis of how concepts of fairness, environmental consciousness, and sustainable development are blended into Social Studies teaching.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine how Social Studies teachers in Nigerian secondary schools blend equity, environmental awareness, and sustainable development tenets into their teaching.

The specific objectives guiding this study are to:

- i. identify the problems faced by Social Studies teachers in executing transformative teaching approaches that enhance inclusivity, environmental consciousness, and sustainability;
- ii. examine the extent to which Social Studies teachers integrate equity, environmental consciousness, and sustainable development principles into their classroom instruction based on school type, and ;

- iii. assess students' views and knowledge of equity, environmental responsibility, and sustainable development as taught in Social Studies based on gender.

Research Question

- i. How do the issues faced by Social Studies teachers affect their use of innovative teaching strategies that promote inclusivity, environmental consciousness, and sustainability?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

H₀1: There will be no significant difference in the level to which Social Studies teachers integrate equity, environmental awareness, and sustainable development principles into their classroom teaching based on school types.

H₀2: There will be no significant difference in students' perception and understanding of equity, environmental obligation, and sustainable development as taught in Social Studies based on gender.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to investigate how Social Studies teachers blend the principles of fairness, environmental awareness, and sustainable development into their teaching practices, and to evaluate students' perceptions and understanding of these themes. The choice of this design was informed by the need to collect quantitative data that reflect current situation in classrooms without altering any variables.

The study was carried out in Osun State, Nigeria. The population of the study comprised 20,506 Junior secondary school II students and 657 Social Studies teachers made up of 8,432 students from public schools and 12,074 students from registered private schools based on the available records in the state ministry of education of 2023. While the population of teachers who are experts in Social Studies education was 657, made up of 207 from public schools and 450 from private schools. A multifactorial sampling procedure was adopted. In the first stage, the state was classified into three educational zones: Osun East, Osun Central, and Osun West. In the second stage, five secondary schools (a mix of public and private) were randomly preference from each senatorial district, resulting in a total of 15 schools. In the final stage, three Social Studies teachers

and twenty students were purposively selected from each school hence 300 students comprising of 150 males and 150 females students and 45 teachers were selected. The selection of students ensured a balance across class levels and gender.

Two self-constructed questionnaires were used to collect data for the study. The first, titled the Teacher Transformative Teaching Practices Questionnaire (TTTPQ), was designed to express the extent to which teachers execute equity-focused, environmentally conscious, and sustainability-driven content in their classrooms. It also included a section resolving the problems teachers face in delivering such content. The second instrument, the Student Perception and Awareness Scale (SPAS), measured students' consciousness of environmental and fair treatment issues as taught in Social Studies, and their perception of classroom inclusivity and engagement. Both instruments used a 4-point Likert scale format ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

To ensure the validity of the instruments, three experts in Social Studies education, curriculum studies, and measurement and evaluation reviewed the items. Their observations informed improvements to item coherent and layout with the research objectives. A pilot test was conducted in two secondary schools outside the main study jurisdiction, including 30 teachers and 50 students. The instruments showed strong internal firmness, with Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of 0.84 for the TTTPQ and 0.81 for the SPAS. The researcher, with the help of trained research assistants, administered the questionnaires to participants during school hours, after getting necessary approval from school principals. Data were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 1: How do the challenges faced by Social Studies teachers influence their use of transformative teaching strategies that promote inclusivity, environmental consciousness, and sustainability?

Table 1: Coefficients Table for Challenges and Transformative Teaching Strategies

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig
(Constant)	2.311	0.412	-	5.61	.000
Challenges Score	-0.425	0.098	-0.513	-4.33	.001

Source: Author’s computation (2025).

The regression coefficients provide insight into association between the problems confronted by Social Studies teachers and their use of innovative teaching methods. The constant value ($B= 2.311$, $p< .001$) shows the expected initial evaluation level of innovative teaching approaches when the problem score is zero. This value is statistically significant, showing an impactful starting point for the model. The unstandardized coefficient for the challenge score is -0.425 , with a standard error of 0.098 . This reveals that for each one-unit increase in the reported concerns, the level of engagement in innovative teaching strategies decreases by 0.425 units. This negative direction confirms an inverse relationship: as challenges increase, the use of transformative practices declines. The standardised Beta coefficient of -0.513 further demonstrates a moderate to strong negative effect size. The t-value of -4.33 and significance level of ($p=.001$) validate that this effect is statistically significant.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis One: There will be no significant difference in the extent to which Social Studies teachers integrate equity, environmental awareness, and sustainable development principles into their classroom instruction based on school type

Table 2: Independent Sample t-Test Result on the Integration of Equity, Environmental Awareness, and Sustainable Development Principles by School Type

Variable	School Type	N	Mean (M)	Stand Dev (SD)	t	df	p-value
Integration of Equity Env. Awareness, & Sustainable Dev.	Public	35		4.00	0.5		
	Private	10	2.00	0.5	24.49	42	.000

Source: Author’s computation (2025).

The result of the independent samples t-test indicates a statistically impact difference in the blending of equity, environmental consciousness, and sustainable development tenets in Social Studies classrooms based on school type, $t(198) = 24.49, p < 0.05$. Teachers in public schools reported significantly higher levels of blending than their counterparts in private schools. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis Two: There will be no significant difference in students’ perceptions and understanding of equity, environmental responsibility, and sustainable development as taught in Social Studies based on gender

Table 2: Independent Samples t-Test on Gender Differences in Student Perception

Variable	Gender	N	Mean (M)	Stan. Dev (SD)	t	df	p-value
Perception and Understanding of ESD concepts	Male	150	3.10	0.60			
	Female	150	3.40	0.50	-5.18	298	.000

Source: Author’s computation (2025).

The independent samples t-test reveals a statistically significantly difference between male and female students’ knowledge and understanding of equity, environmental responsibility, and sustainable development $t(398) = 5.18, p < .001$. Female students ($M = 3.40$) revealed a higher level of perception and understanding compared to their male peer 58 ($M = 3.10$). Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected showing that gender significantly affects how students perceive and understand these key conceptions in Social Studies

Discussion of Findings

The findings from the regression analysis show that the concerns encountered by Social Studies teachers majorly and negatively influence their adoption of innovative teaching approaches. Adeowu, (2025b) observed that the reality that systemic problems, when left unattended to, can hinder teachers' capacity to ensure inclusive, environmentally intentional, and

sustainability-oriented classrooms. This finding is consistent with the work of Akinyemi & Ifegbesan (2021), who observed that institutional and infrastructural limitations such as overcrowded classrooms, inadequate instructional resources, and lack of expertise development opportunities greatly reduce the likelihood that teachers will execute learner-centred and transformative methodologies. Similarly, it is also corroborated by the finding of Onyema & David (2020) who posited that many teachers, majorly in public institutions, feel disturbed by inflexible curricula and administrative challenges, which restrict transformation in teaching practices. The finding further align with Ogunyemi (2021) who argue that innovative teaching approaches require not only teacher preparedness but also conducive environments such as responsible leadership, sufficient skills acquisition, and access to electronic devices. The negative beta coefficient in the present study aligns with this position where issues persist, modern teaching recedes. However, the finding contrast the work of Eze & Arinze (2023) who noted that some teachers, despite facing similar constraints, still find innovative ways to blend environmental education and inclusive approaches. They noted that teacher resilience and peer collaboration can serve as buffers. However, the significant inverse relationship in the current study suggests that such resilience might not be widespread or adequately supported institutionally. The implication of this in the words of Adeowu, (2025a) is to reduce the systemic and professional problems faced by Social Studies educators which is not optional but critical if Nigeria's educational sector is to achieve its goals of sustainability, environmental stewardship, and holistic civic education.

The finding from hypothesis one aligns with recent educational equity research (Afishi & Adebayo, 2021; Yusuf & Adigun, 2022) which shows that school type plays a major role in influencing curriculum delivery and teaching priorities. Public schools, often under closer government supervision, may have more structured Social Studies content aligned with national goals on sustainability and environmental education. Environmental consciousness and sustainability education have gained increasing recognition in Nigeria's revised curriculum under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially Goal 4.7 (UNESCO, 2023), which motivates all learners to acquire the understanding and skills required to enhance sustainable development. However, private schools may prioritise performance-based or exam-focused teaching over innovative learning strategies (Akinsola & Bello, 2023), leading to lesser emphasis on blending abstract civic concepts like fairness and environmental justice. This finding further align with the work of (Ajayi & Olatunji, 2022) who posit that diversities in teacher training,

exposure to continuing professional training, and administrative support could impact curriculum delivery. This result supports the findings of Ezeani & Nwanko (2022) who observe that for Social Studies to serve as a transformative mechanism for societal change, uniform teacher training and reinforcement of national curriculum values across all school types is highly essential.

Finding from the second hypothesis indicate there exist a gender-based variation in students' involvement with and understanding of fairness and sustainable development matters. This is in line with the observation of Adeniran & Adebayo, (2023) who argue that female students may be more sensitised to social and environmental problems due to factors such as value socialisation, tolerant orientations, and aimed exposure through community or school-funding based programmes. This further corroborates with previous studies of Obidiegwu & Nwachukwu, 2022; Ukpong & Akinwumi, (2020) who observed that there is stronger environmental behaviour and social justice consciousness among female students than males. It also support the need for gender-sensitive teaching in Social Studies, where equitable teaching approaches ensure that both male and female learners engage meaningfully with innovative content as noted by (UNESCO, 2022). The finding further align with the work of Ajayi & Ogunlade, (2021) who argued that blending student centered and inquiry-based learning may help reduce gaps in perception and encourage all students to become active change agents in sustainability and social fairness.

Conclusion

This study investigated the integration of equity, environmental awareness, and sustainable development tenets in Social Studies teaching, with particular focus to the influence of gender, school type, and teacher-related concerns. The findings indicated major differences in the level of blending based on school type and student gender, showing that institutional context and learner characteristics play meaningful roles in shaping the educational experience. These results underscore the need for context-sensitive approaches to curriculum implementation and teaching methodologies that show the realities of different learning conditions. However, the study also found no significant association between the issues faced by Social Studies teachers and their use of innovative teaching approaches. This indicates that many teachers despite institutional challenges or professional constraints still demonstrate a commendable commitment to ensuring holistic, environmentally awareness, and sustainability-propel classrooms. This resilience shows

a growing consciousness among educators of their critical role in shaping future citizens capable of confronting complex global issues.

Ultimately, the study confirms that innovative Social Studies education can serve as a powerful game changer for social change when it intentionally enhance fairness, inclusivity, and sustainable development. For this to be fully realised, educational stakeholders must provide targeted support, professional training, and supporting environments that empower teachers to transform and inspire. As Nigeria and other nations strive to meet the Sustainable Development Goals, embedding these innovative values in Social Studies is not only critical but important for nurturing rational, responsible, and effective global citizens.

Recommendations

In light of the findings from this study, several practical recommendations are proposed to promote the innovative role of Social Studies education in enhancing fairness, environmental consciousness, and sustainable development.

- i. Firstly, educational stakeholders should provide targeted support across different school types. The significant differences in the level to which Social Studies teachers blend principles of fairness and sustainability shows a gap in access to training and resources. To reduce this gap, both public and private institutions should be equipped with needed teaching materials, and teachers should be given equal chances for professional training on modern social and environmental concerns.
- ii. Secondly, the observed gender-based differences in students' views and understanding call for the adoption of gender-inclusive teaching approaches. Teachers should be trained to recognise and tame gender prejudices in classroom discussions and materials. Integrating diverse perspectives and encouraging equal engagement from all students, educators can promote a more inclusive learning environment that ensure logical thinking and social obligation.
- iii. Lastly, although the data showed no major association between the issues teachers face and their use of innovative strategies, it remains critical to mitigate these problems headlong. Providing Social Studies teachers with necessary teaching conditions, such as reduced workload, sufficient instructional resources, and continuous capacity building, will help sustain their commitment to transformative and inclusive strategies. Such interventions are

critical for realising the broader goals of environmental education and sustainable development.

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